

## **Stranger Things: A Novelization by DaisyDaze111**

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**Summary:** This is a novelization of Netflix's original series Stranger Things. I do not own the characters, settings, or plotlines. I only hope to put the Duffer brothers' fantastic story and characters into words. I tried to keep all the dialogue and the events the same, and I tried to be creative, but true to the characters, when filling in inner thoughts. Hope you enjoy it!

# 1. Prelude

*[This is a novelization of Netflix's original series Stranger Things. I do not own any of the characters or settings or plots.]*

*November 6, 1983 - Hawkins, Indiana*

The night was clear and crisp. A perfect autumn evening, with the stars shining, not a single cloud in the night sky. Crickets creaked and wings fluttered, their symphony added to the soft rustling of the leaves. Some might have said it was quiet, others that it was too quiet.

Centered among the perimeter of a high chain-linked fence was a dark, official-looking building. On the fence a sign read *Hawkins National Laboratory - U.S. Department of Energy*. The building appeared deserted for the night, most people having gone home to their families and dinners. However, in one dark hallway the lights flickered as if the building was experiencing electrical issues. A door at the end of the short hall stood closed. It was a heavy looking door, one surely not easy to force open. But open it did as a middle-aged man, wearing a white lab coat, burst through. As he did the sound of an alarm could be heard, steady and loud.

The man ran down the hall and turned the corner, making a beeline for the only thing worth reaching. An elevator. Sweat drenched his face, and the man took great panicked gulps of air. Several times the man looked frightfully over his shoulder, clearly he was running from something. Reaching the elevator, the man pummeled the button many times as if he could summon the carriage more quickly. Waiting for the lift that could not come fast enough, the man searched the hall behind him but it remained empty.

The elevator doors opened and he hurried inside quickly pressing the buttons for the upper levels. Waiting for the doors to enclose him he watched the hall for any sign of movement, as he did his ears registered a strange and terrible sound. A sound like growling but it did not come from down the hall. No. It sounded far closer. Gripped in sheer terror the man tilted his head back to glance above him. Suddenly the man was lifted up by some unknown force and the

elevator doors closed upon the horrified screams of a man clearly meeting a gruesome death.

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Several miles off, the quiet of the night was broken, along the neat lawns of a suburban neighborhood, by the start of a sprinkler. Families all along the street prepared themselves for bed, having jobs and schools to go to in the morning. But in one basement sat four boys not tired in the slightest and far from preparations of the coming morning.

"Something is coming. Something hungry for blood," said Mike Wheeler, a young boy with long dark hair and a thin face. His voice was soft as he regaled his friends with an announcement of impending doom. "A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness. It is almost here."

The others boys stared in awe and crushing anxiety.

"What is it?" asked Will.

"What if it's the Demogorgon?" piped up Dustin. "Oh Jesus, we're so screwed if it's the Demogorgon."

Lucas quipped, "It's not the Demogorgon."

"An army of troglodytes charge into the chamber," exclaimed Mike.

Dustin almost sighed in relief and amusement. "Troglodytes?"

"Told ya," Lucas jibed.

The boys chuckled, amused, one even snorted.

"Wait a minute," Mike suddenly grew serious. "Do you hear that? That...that sound." The boys stared around at one another, the basement once again flooded with nervous anticipation.

Their leader continued, "Boom...boom. Boom!" He slammed his hands on the table.

His three friends all gave a startled jump.

"That didn't come from the troglodytes. No, that...that came from something else." He slammed a game piece onto the table proclaiming loudly, "The Demogorgon!"

The boys groaned in unison.

"We're in deep shit!"

Mike implored the boy across from him, "Will, your action!"

"I don't know!" Will said hopelessly.

"Fireball him!" Lucas asserted.

"I'd have to roll a thirteen or higher!" Will protested.

"Too risky," said Dustin. "Cast a protection spell."

"Don't be a pussy. Fireball him!"

"Cast protection."

Mike cut across his friends, "The Demogorgon is tired of your silly human bickering. It stomps toward you. Boom!"

"Fireball him, Will!"

"Another stomp, boom!"

"Cast protection!"

"It roars in anger!" shouted Mike, clearly enjoying himself as Will struggled to come to a decision. Throwing caution to the wind Will cried out, "Fireball!" and threw the dice across the table which scattered across the surface and onto the floor.

"Oh shit!" Will yelled.

Mike hurried to search the basement floor, "Where'd it go? Where is it?"

"I don't know!" Will scrambled across the floor as his friends frantically looked about them for any sign of the dice.

"Is it a thirteen?" asked Dustin.

"I don't know!" he said, yet again.

Lucas grew exasperated, "Where is it?"

Dustin felt this was too much for him to handle as he kept up a string of "Oh my God, oh my God, oh my Gods."

Shouting over each other and crawling across the basement floor in search of the elusive dice, the leader of the little gang failed to notice the distant sound of a woman's voice calling out.

"Mike! Mike!" The door to the basement opened and a lovely woman stood at the top of the steps. "*Mike!*"

Mike, still on his knees stared up at his mother, annoyed. "Mom, we're in the middle of a campaign."

"You mean the end? Fifteen after, " With a stern look his mother retreated into the house. Mike bolted up the steps, his friends' voices fading as he entered the kitchen to bargain with his mother.

"Mom, wait, just twenty more minutes."

Karen shook her head, "It's a school night, Michael. I just put Holly to bed. You can finish next weekend."

"But that'll ruin the flow."

"Michael-" she started, but he cut across her. Evidently, she didn't understand the importance of this night.

"I'm serious, Mom. The campaign took two weeks to plan," He hated the pleading sound in his voice, but this was far more important than his pride. He added in a low mumble. "How was I supposed to know it was going to take ten hours?"

"You've been playing for ten hours?" she asked, sounding most displeased.

Exasperated, Mike turned to his dad, who stood before the television,

fiddling with the antennas.

"Dad, don't you think that twenty more-"

Not looking up, Ted interrupted his son, "I think you should listen to your mother."

Static issued from the television and Ted slammed his palm on the top with frustration. "Dang dumb piece of junk," and he continued fiddling with the antennas.

Mike rolled his eyes and gave his parents up as a lost cause. Down in the basement Will snatched something small out from under the stairwell.

"Oh, I got it! Does the seven count?"

Lucas cast a glance at Will. "It was a seven? Did Mike see it?" Will shook his head no and Lucas retorted as if speaking to someone dense, "Then it doesn't count."

Putting their jackets on they cleaned up the space, knowing their next campaign would be jeopardized if they didn't.

Lifting up a pizza box Dustin peered inside then asked, "Oh hey guys. Does anyone want this?"

"No," replied Lucas and Will before they climbed the steps out of the basement.

On the second landing of the house Dustin heard a soft voice speaking in a broken up conversation of one who speaks to someone on a phone.

"Oh yeah...No I don't think...Yeah, he's cute...Barb, no, I don't think so."

Dustin stood at the entrance of a girl's room and waved to catch Nancy's attention, but she didn't seem to notice.

"Barb, you're not-"

Dustin quickly interrupted, "Hey, Nancy." She glanced up. "There's a slice left if you want it. Sausage and pepperoni."

"Hold on." She set the phone upon the mattress, got up, and crossed the room. Dustin grinned at her and she smirked back sarcastically before slamming the door in his face.

Outside, where Lucas and Will prepared to mount their bikes Dustin informed Mike, "There's something wrong with your sister."

"What are you talking about?" Mike asked.

"She's got a stick up her butt," he replied.

"Yeah," Lucas piped up. "It's because she's been dating that douche-bag, Steve Harrington."

"Yep, she's turning into a real jerk," Dustin complained.

Mike rolled his eyes. "She's always been a real jerk."

Beginning to peddle away, Dustin said, "Nuh-uh, she used to be cool. Like that time she dressed up as an elf for our Elder tree campaign."

"Four years ago!" Mike reminded him.

"Just sayin'," he called back.

"Later," said Lucas as he too peddled away.

Will stood with one leg on either side of his bike but had not mounted the seat. Looking up at Mike, who was slightly taller than him, he said, "It was a seven."

"Huh?"

"The roll," Will explained. "It was a seven. The Demogorgon, it got me." He got on his bike too. "Welp, see you tomorrow."

Will peddled away. As Mike watched his friend bike away the lights over their garage flickered, and he looked around momentarily puzzled. Then, with a tired shrug, he turned the outside lights off and

headed back in.

The three boys biked side-by-side down the middle of the dark road, headlights lighting the path before them. They passed a young couple walking opposite them on an evening date. Lucas swerved across the road, riding up to his house, calling out as he did so, "Good night ladies."

"Kiss your mom 'night for me," Dustin responded slyly. He turned toward Will. "Race you back to my place? Winner gets a comic."

"Any comic?" Will asked, interested.

"Yeah," he answered. Immediately, Will lowered himself closer to his handlebars and sped off.

Dustin called out, "Hey. Hey! I didn't say go! Get back here!" But Will continued to speed down the road until a few minutes later he raced passed a small neat home.

"I'm gonna kill you!" Dustin yelled.

"I'll take your X-men 134!" replied Will.

Dustin coasted to a stop using his feet to brake before his mailbox, panting from their race. "Son of a bitch," he said.

Turning down Mirkwood, Will reveled in the fill of the night air against his face. It had grown colder and a fog had begun to settle over the ground but Will didn't mind after the long hours spent in Mike's basement for the campaign. The area grew darker as street lamps had not been placed this far out into the woods. The light from his bike passed over the fence of Hawkins Lab and Will knew he would be home in minutes. He suddenly realized how tired he was after all and looked forward to bed. To Will, the night felt like any other night.

Suddenly the headlight of his bike dimmed before completely blacking out. Will looked down at it, puzzled, but before he could begin to form ideas of what caused it, the light popped back on. He looked back up to watch where he was going and that's when he saw it.



He gasped in fright and instinct caused him to jerk his handlebars to the right. He felt the wheels roll off the road and he was thrown from his bike. Groaning in pain Will pulled himself onto all fours. He could feel a burning sting in his knees and he knew he had scraped them pretty bad. A terrible snarling noise sounded from several paces away. Like some rabid animal. Gasping again in fear, Will jumped to his feet, pain and bike forgotten. He fled through the trees in the direction where he knew home, and safety, waited.

He ran fast. Faster than he had ever run in his life. He felt the pounding of the his feet upon the ground, his backpack slamming on his back with every terrified step. What was that thing he had seen? It had looked like a tall, skinny man but strangely distorted. Yet what man made snarling sounds like that? Coming to the driveway of his home, he pushed himself harder. Every breath drawn becoming more ragged and panicked. He didn't dare look behind him.

Finally, Will reached his home and he darted inside grateful to find the front door unlocked. He quickly locked the door, half-afraid that the chain lock wasn't strong enough to keep the stranger out. The family dog barked loudly at the front door.

Running throughout the house Will called out, "Mom? Jonathan?" No one answered.

Panicked Will checked his mother's bedroom, "Mom?" Finding no one Will wondered if the thing had followed him all the way here, or maybe, just maybe it never gave chase. He ran to the living room and lifted the blinds to the front window. He peered into the foggy night. At first he saw nothing but then the horrifying sight of an approaching silhouette could be seen just beyond the clothes hanging from the clothes line in the yard.

Absolutely shivering in horror Will ran to the phone on the wall and dialed the emergency number.

The line rang a couple of times before someone picked up, but no one spoke.

"Hello?! Hello?!" Will shouted into the receiver but the line turned to static. As he desperately listened for someone to come across the line

a shadow passed over the window of the front door. Will froze in terror and as he stood there he saw the chain lock slide easily from the holder of its own accord, as if someone invisible had just unlocked the door.

Dropping the phone Will turned and fled out the back door. All thought vanished from mind now except that of survival. He burst into the shed out back turning the light on, and shutting the door behind him. Grabbing the shotgun off the wall he poured a box of bullets over the table, and with trembling fingers, he quickly loaded the gun. With the cartridge loaded and safety off, Will held the gun aimed at the door, waiting as he shook with fright. He heard growling but it did not come from outside the shed. It came from within. Will turned to peer behind him as something seemed to grow taller, and the light in the shed grew brighter. In fact the light grew so bright it was a shock it didn't burst with the force of its power. The light became blinding until, quite suddenly, the light dimmed back to its normal level of brightness and all was quiet. The strange silhouette, and Will, nowhere to be seen.

## 2. Chapter 1 - The Vanishing of Will Byers

*[Here is Chapter One! I know it's long, sorry about that, but I wanted to capture each episode in one chapter. Hope you all enjoy it, and rest assured I've already begun working on Chapter Two! Let me know what you think!]*

### Chapter One - The Vanishing of Will Byers

The next morning was bright with clear skies and warmer, by far, than the night before. A house, overlooking a lake that reflected the sun and trees, sat silent with no signs of life. It was not a tidy home yet showed signs of once being a happy one. A child's drawing hung on a wall consisting of a house and three stick figures, one being obviously male and another female, with the last, and smaller one, female as well.

A small dining table held various items including several empty beer cans and a plate with an unfinished sandwich. The coffee table in the living area also contained clutter, most of which consisted of more depleted cans of beer, and a filthy ashtray. On the couch lay a large bearded and graying man asleep in jeans and no shirt. The floor of the man's home was strewn with clothes, books, and magazines.

Voices issued from a small television which had been left on while the man slept.

"And that's it for *News Center* this morning. Thanks for joining us. Let's hand off now to Liz at the news desk," said a reporter on screen. The camera switched to a young woman who spoke in professional and dispassionate tones.

"Alright, thank you, Donna. Turning now to local news, we're getting reports of surges and power outages all across the county. Last night, hundreds of homes in East Hawkins were affected, leaving many residents in the dark. The cause of the outage is still unknown. We reached out to *Roane County Water and Electric*, and a spokesperson says that they are confident power will be restored to all remaining homes within the next several hours."

Outside of the open living room window a dog barked. The man snorted awake. With a sigh he rolled over to his back, glancing at his watch and groaning.

Out on a patio looking toward the lake, the man smoked a cigarette feeling the chilly morning air on his shirtless skin. He shivered as he peered at the trees opposite him on the water's edge.

"Mmm," he murmured.

Heading back inside he began gearing up for the day. Showering and brushing his teeth, he occasionally took puffs of his cigarette. He popped a few pills from a prescription bottle and chased them down with a warm beer. He stared at his reflection, smoking his cigarette before smirking and leaving the bathroom to dress.

The man put on a pair of light tan pants with a matching buttoned shirt, which he tucked in before looping a belt into the pants and adding a gun holster, complete with firearm, before buckling up. Sticking a pen in his breast pocket, he grabbed his sheriff's hat and left the house with the television still going.

"In other news, you might want to stay home tonight or at least pack an umbrella. We turn to everybody's favorite morning weather guy, Charles."

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"Where the hell are they?" said Joyce Byers as she frantically searched the cluttered surface of a coffee table. "Jonathan?"

A young man cooking at the stove in the kitchen looked over his shoulder, calling back, "Check the couch."

Rummaging through blankets and pillows on the couch she complained, "Ugh, I did." Feeling under a pillow she pulled out a set of car keys "Oh...Got them."

Jonathan turned back to the stove-top as Joyce came into the kitchen. Rubbing his shoulder she said, "Okay, Sweetie, I will see you tonight."

"Yeah, see you later," he answered.

Joyce made to head off but pulled up short before turning back and asking, "Where's Will?"

"Oh, I didn't get him up yet. He's probably still sleeping," said Jonathan.

Aggravated, Joyce sighed, "Jonathan, you have to make sure he's up."

"Mom, I'm making breakfast," he complained.

Hurrying across to the bedroom hallway she mumbled, "I told you this a thousand times. Will! Come on, honey. It's time to get up." She opened a door to find an unmade and vacant bed.

Back in the kitchen, Joyce asked, concerned, "He came home last night, right?"

"He's not in his room?" asked Jonathan.

"Did he come home or not?" Joyce repeated.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Joyce said, incredulously.

Stammering, with a guilty look at his mother, Jonathan said, "I-I-I got home late. I was working..."

"You were working?" Joyce said, angrily.

"Eric asked if I could cover. I said yeah. I just thought we could use the extra cash."

"Jonathan, we've talked about this."

"I know. I know," he admitted, ashamed.

"You can't take shifts when I'm working!"

Feeling slightly defensive Jonathan tried to ease over the matter, "Mom, it's not a big deal. Look, he was at the Wheelers' all day. I'm sure he just stayed over."

Joyce sighed again and pulled the phone from the wall, dialing a number.

"I can't believe you. I can't believe you sometimes," she fretted.

In another, far nicer and larger home, a family sat around a dining table. The phone rang as Mike Wheeler poured syrup over his scrambled eggs.

"That's disgusting," said Nancy, cringing at the disgraceful state of her brother's plate.

"You're disgusting!" Mike shot back.

Karen picked up the phone, holding a small girl over her hip with her other arm. "Hello?"

"Hi, Karen. It's Joyce," said Joyce.

"Oh, Joyce, hi."

With his mother's back turned, Mike quickly poured syrup over his sister's scrambled eggs.

"What the hell Mike?" Nancy shouted.

"Language!" Ted yelled at his daughter.

"Quiet!" Karen hollered over her shoulder.

Mike chuckled, while Nancy implored her father to side with her, gesturing toward Mike. "Are you kidding?" she asked incensed.

"Sorry Joyce. I guess it's just one of those mornings," Karen apologized.

Joyce held the phone closer to her ear. "Was that Will I heard back there?"

"Will? No, no, no it's just Mike."

"Will didn't spend the night?" Joyce persisted.

"No, he left here a little bit after eight? Why he's not home?"

"Um, you know what? I think he just left early for...for school. Thank you so much. Bye."

Karen nodded, "Okay. Bye."

Hanging up the phone Joyce turned back to Jonathan, who stared back, both looking very concerned.

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Half an hour later Mike, Dustin, and Lucas all placed their bikes in the bike rack in front of Hawkins Middle School, as students and teachers arrived all around them in buses and cars, on bikes and foot.

Searching the front of the school Mike said, "That's weird. I don't see him."

"I'm telling you. His mom's right," said Lucas. "He probably just went to class early again."

"Yeah," interjected Dustin. "He's always paranoid Gursky's gonna give him another pop quiz."

Walking side-by-side they heard a voice from behind, "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen."

With equal amounts of disdain apparent on their faces, the three friends turned to face Troy and his best friend James.

"Step right up and get your tickets for the freak show," said Troy. "Who do you think would make more money in a freak show?" He asked James. Coming near them he punched Lucas and said, "Midnight," he punched Mike, "Frogface," and lastly, he punched Dustin, "or Toothless?"

James frowned as if thinking in contemplation before saying, with an exaggerated lisp, "I'd go with Toophless."

"I told you a million times, my teeth are coming in. It's called cleidocranial dysplasia," whined Dustin.

James mimicked Dustin with his fake lisp, "I told you a million times'."

"Do the arm thing," commanded Troy.

When Dustin did not respond James made a threatening motion. "Do it freak!"

Dustin shook his head but threw his bag onto the ground and removed his jacket. He cracked his bones and pulled his shoulders closer together. Both bullies groaned in disgust.

"God, it gets me every time," said Troy. He shoved past Mike and Lucas, leaving with James.

"Assholes," said Lucas.

"I think it's kinda cool,' Mike told Dustin as the latter put his jacket back on and retrieved his backpack. "It's like you have superpowers or something. Like Mr. Fantastic."

"Yeah, except I can't fight evil with it," Dustin said, regretfully.

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A couple miles away the first morning bell rang at Hawkins High School. As Nancy walked down the crowded hall to her locker another, larger girl, with ginger hair kept short, fell in step with her.

"So, did he call?" asked Barbara Holland.

Nancy looked quickly around herself, whispering forcefully, "Keep your voice down!"

Barb whispered back, teasingly, "Did he?"

With a slight smile Nancy said, "I told you, it's not like that. Okay, I mean, yes, he likes me but not like that."

Reaching up to fiddle with the dial on her locker Nancy added, "We just...made out a couple times."

Barb leaned on the lockers beside Nancy's and repeated in a dreamy



voice, "'We just...made out a couple times'. Nance, seriously, you're gonna be so cool now, it's ridiculous."

"No, I'm not," she said, as if offended.

"You better still hang out with me, that's all I'm saying. If you become friends with Tommy H. or Carol-"

"Oh, that's gross!" Nancy interrupted. "Okay, I'm telling you, it was a one time," she grinned, "two time thing." Turning to the contents in her now open locker Nancy noticed a folded note in the bottom left corner. Pulling it out she read, 'Meet me. Bathroom - Steve'.

"You were saying?" asked Barb knowingly.

Nancy smiled at Barb with an almost guilty look.

Minutes later Nancy felt herself being pinned against the wall of the boys' bathroom her lips locked to Steve Harrington's.

"Steve..." Nancy sighed as Steve moved to her neck and ear, laying a path with his kisses.

"Mmm-hmm?" he murmured.

She placed her hands on his chest and said, "I have to go."

"In a minute," he said as he kissed her, nuzzling her with his nose.

Another bell rang and Nancy took a quick glance at her watch before Steve claimed her mouth again with his own.

"Steve, I really like...seriously, have to go," she said breathlessly. Darting down she made to pick her bag up off the floor but Steve was too fast for her and snatched it from her lax grip.

"Oh no no no no. Come on, let's do something tonight, yeah?" said Steve.

Grabbing her books she said, "Uh...No I can't. I have to study for Kaminsky's test."

Steve leaned casually against the wall, and Nancy couldn't help but think how cool he looked with his messy hair, windbreaker and jeans.

"Oh come on," he was saying. "What's your GPA again? Three point nine nine nine..."

Trying to snatch her bag back she defended herself by complaining, "Kaminsky's tests are impossible."

Holding her bag out of reach Steve said, "Well then just let me help."

"You failed chem," she reminded him as she tried yet again to snatch her bag back.

"C-minus."

"Well, in that case..." Nancy teased, sarcastically.

Steve returned her bag to her. "So, I'll be over around say, like eight?"

"Are you crazy? My mom would not allow..."

"I'll climb through your window. She won't even know I'm there. I'm stealthy, like a ninja."

Nancy smirked, "You are crazy." She tried to leave but Steve stopped her and pulled her into him. She felt the warmth of his body against hers and she felt that he took her very breath away.

"Wait, wait, wait," he said. "Just...okay forget about that. We can just...We can just, like, chill in my car. We can find a nice quiet place to park, and..."

Nancy forced herself to remain firm. No matter how cute or popular he was she didn't want to lose her reputation of being the smartest girl in the school. "Steve...I have to study. I'm not kidding."

"Well, why do you think I want it to be nice and quiet?" he said innocently.

Nancy smiled amused, "You're an idiot, Steve Harrington."

Steve sighed as Nancy walked away but she thought hard for a moment and decided it was worth the risk. Pausing at the bathroom entrance she turned back and said, "Meet me at Dearborn and Maple at eight. To study," she added, when he began to look smug. Grinning at him she hurried off to class.

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After parking his truck Chief Jim Hopper entered the police station, sauntering past the clerk's desk with a cigarette between his lips.

"Good of you to show," said an older woman sitting at the front desk.

"Oh, hey, morning Flo," said Hopper. "Morning everybody."

"Hey, Chief," said Officer Calvin Powell holding a portion of a deck of cards fanned out before him.

"Damn!" greeted Officer Phil Callahan. "You look like hell, Chief."

"Oh yeah," said Hopper.

Callahan chuckled, "Yeah."

"Well, I looked better than your wife when I left her this morning," Hopper said with a sly glance.

The officers laughed and Hopper went to grab a cup of coffee as Flo made her way over.

Seizing the cigarette from his mouth she said, "While you were drinking or sleeping, or whatever it is you deemed so necessary on Monday morning, Phil Larson called. Said some kids are stealing the gnomes out of his garden again."

Hopper captured a glazed donut out of a box on the coffee stand. "Oh, those garden gnomes again. Well, I'll tell you what, I'm gonna get right on that."

Pausing behind Powell he pulled a card out of the ones lined up in his hands and placed it in the front, holding the donut between his teeth.

Flo continued, "On a more pressing matter, Joyce Byers can't find her son this morning."

"Mmmm," came his muffled reply. "Okay, I'll get on that. Just give me a minute."

"Joyce is very upset. She-she-"

But Hopper interrupted her. "Well Flo, Flo, we've discussed this. Mornings are for coffee and contemplation."

"Chief, she's already in your-"

"Coffee and contemplation, Flo!" he repeated.

Turning a corner he entered his office to find Joyce waiting anxiously for him.

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'MISSING' typed Hopper onto an initial police report he had stuffed into the typewriter on his desk.

"I have been waiting here for over an hour, Hopper," Joyce griped for about the umpteenth time.

Exhaling deeply, Hopper said, "And, I apologize, again."

"I'm going out of my mind," Joyce said, and indeed she felt on the verge of panic as she stood in Hopper's office with a cigarette in her trembling hand.

"Look, boy his age, he's probably just playing hookie, okay?" placated Hopper.

"No," she shook her head. "Not my Will. He's not like that. He wouldn't do that."

Hopper leaned back in his chair. "Well, you never know. I mean, my mom thought that I was on the debate team, when really I was just screwing Chrissy Carpenter in the back of my dad's Oldsmobile, so..."

"No...he...Look he's not like you, Hopper. He's not like me. He's not

like...most," she struggled to make him understand. "He has a couple of friends but, you know, the kids, they're mean. They make fun of him. They call him names. They laugh at him, his clothes-"

Confused, Hopper repeated, "His clothes? What's wrong with his clothes?"

"I don't know. Does that matter?"

"Maybe."

"Look, he's ...He's a sensitive kid. Lonnie," she sighed, not wanting him to get the wrong idea or judge Will. "Lonnie used to say he was queer. Called him a fag," she finished in a whisper.

"Is he?"

"He's missing is what he is," she said loudly, agitated. With a shaking hand she took a puff of her cigarette.

"When was the last time you heard from Lonnie?" Hopper asked.

Joyce scoffed. "Uh, last I heard, he was in Indianapolis. That was about a year ago. But he has nothing to do with this," she added quickly.

"Why don't you give me his number?"

"You know Hopper, he has nothing to do with this. Trust me," she said confidently.

"Joyce, ninety-nine out of a hundred times, kid goes missing, the kid is with a parent or relative," he spouted off.

"W-what about the other time?"

"What?" he asked, confused again.

"You said ninety-nine out of a hundred. What about the other time, the one?"

"Joyce," he sighed wearily.

"The one!" she said loudly.

Why was it that people always jumped to the worst conclusion? Why were people so determined to believe something terrible had happened? "Joyce, this is Hawkins, okay?"

Joyce huffed, frustrated.

"You wanna know the worst thing that's ever happened here in the four years that I've been working here? Do you wanna know the worst thing? It was when an owl attacked Eleanor Gillespie's head because it thought that her hair was a nest."

"Okay fine," she conceded. "I will call Lonnie. He will talk to me before he talks to-"

"What, a pig?" he said with frustration.

"A cop!" Joyce felt as if she wanted to throttle him and her voice broke with the stress of not knowing where her boy was. "Just find my son, Hop. Find him!"

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Hawkins National Laboratory bustled with activity as several unmarked black cars drove through the gated entrance manned by military police.

Stepping out of the vehicles came a handful of business suited men carrying briefcases. Ready to meet them stood a tall, thin man wearing a suit and a black business trench coat under a full head of silver white hair.

"Dr. Brenner," greeted the leader of the men, shaking the tall man's hand.

Strolling down a busy hallway a scientist led the men alongside Dr. Brenner.

"This way, gentlemen," he said. "The entire east wing will be evacuated within the hour. We've sealed off this area following quarantine protocol."

Dr. Brenner, the scientist, and the group of men reached a section of hallway sealed off with a heavy, clear, plastic hazmat tarp. One of the soldiers guarding the entrance quickly unzipped the tarp allowing them access. Inside the designated warm zone of the hazmat scene the men quickly dressed down to their underclothes before donning white hazmat suits complete with air cylinders. They used duct tape to vacuum seal the long, black, rubber gloves over their arms.

Bringing loaded guns with them, the men filed into an elevator heading down into the depths of the facility. Dr. Brenner peered around above his head noticing blood and scrape marks on the ceiling. They were silent with the only sound coming from the elevator and the breathing of the men in their confinement suits. The elevator thudded to a stop. Once the doors had opened they all held up flashlights staring down the dark hall.

It was an eerie sight. Dim lights flickered, casting a bluish glow, and strange flurries floated like cheerless snow all around them. No one spoke. Keeping together they rounded a corner to find a wall and door covered with strange rotten-looking slime that made a weird squelching sound as if alive. Passing through the heavy steel door a faint growling met their ears as they entered a room with control panels, Dr. Brenner now in the lead. They came to a stop staring at a wall with what appeared to be vines and rot growing out of it. It seemed to shift with movements like steady breathing and it was clear that this was the source of the growling.

"This is where it came from?" asked the men's leader.

"Yes," answered the scientist.

"And the girl?"

Dr. Brenner answered him, "She can't have gone far."

---

At the edge of the woods, almost two miles away, a barefooted child walked over the cold leaves wearing nothing but a torn, dirty hospital gown. At first glance the child, with dark hair kept short in a buzz cut, appeared to be a boy. But the soft delicate features, long eyelashes and heart-shaped face gave the girl away. Her face was also

dirty, and though she was clearly still a child, the indistinct angles of her face showed a young girl fast approaching her teen years. She stood gazing at a white building where a large bearded man with a bald head, except for some graying hair around the back of his scalp, carried out a garbage bag with an apron tied around his waist.

She watched him place the bag in a bin and head back inside. The girl cautiously entered the building. She quietly snuck past shelves of food, and around the corner she could see the same large man serving men at a table in a large open room. In fact, there were several tables in this room, some empty, some with people seated, plates of food before them and cups of coffee, half-filled.

"Alright, and one more," said the large man pouring coffee into one of the men's mug.

"Hey, Ben. What do you think about that, uh...game?"

The large man, Ben, answered, "Hey, I don't know. I don't know."

"I don't know thirty-seven points per game average."

"Thirty-seven now but..."

"Mr. Basket."

The girl did not understand what they were saying but this was not her chief concern. Turning to a pair of swinging doors with small windows she entered a room with many shiny surfaces. Upon a counter she found a small basket with a sheet of wax paper and french fries on it. Very slowly she picked up one of the fries, checking through the rectangular opening in the wall to be sure that no one would see her, and she took a bite.

The food was delicious and, looking up quickly to make sure the bearded man was still occupied, she ravaged large handfuls of the food occasionally checking the coast was clear. Devouring the meal she failed to notice Ben turn and peer through the small window in the wall where he paused at the sight of the child gorging herself.

"Hey!" he shouted.



Startled, the girl snapped to attention before snatching the basket and fleeing with every intention of running straight back to the woods.

"Come here!" the large man chased after her. "Hey, come here!"

Catching hold of the girl he spun her to face him and flies flew all over the floor as she dropped the basket in fright.

"You think you can steal from me boy?" he yelled.

But staring down at the scared face before him Benny Hammond realized with a shock that the child was, in fact, a girl.

"What in the hell?" he said.

---

A school bell rang and the students in Scott Clarke's class immediately jumped up from their desks, throwing books into bags and filing out into the hall.

Mr. Clarke informed over their heads, "Remember, finish chapter twelve and answer twelve point three on the difference between an experiment and other forms of science investigation. This will be on the test, which will cover chapters ten through twelve. It will be multiple choice with an essay section." His voice trailed off as some of the last students left without a backward glance.

Turning to face the empty desks of his classroom he found Mike, Dustin, and Lucas waiting eagerly in across from him.

"So, did it come?" asked Mike.

"Sorry boys," Mr. Clarke's expression was solemn. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but...it came!"

Opening the door to a small room housing audio/visual equipment, Mr. Clarke followed the excited boys inside who all crowded around a sophisticated radio system.

"The Heathkit ham shack," Mr. Clarke announced.

Pulling the microphone and headphones toward them, Mike uttered,

"Whoa."

"Ain't she a beaut?" Mr. Clarke agreed.

They fiddled with dials and listened through the headphones.

"I bet you can talk to New York on this thing," presumed Dustin.

Mr. Clarke held his arms out, "Think bigger."

"California?" guessed Lucas.

"Bigger."

"Australia?" said Mike excitedly

Mr. Clarke nodded smiling and the boys laughed exclaiming ecstatically.

"Oh man!" said Lucas. "When Will sees this, he's totally gonna blow his shit!"

Mr. Clarke crossed his arms looking stern, "Lucas!"

"Sorry," said Lucas humbly.

Dustin snickered.

Proclaiming in a fake Australian accent, Mike spoke into the microphone, "Hello, this is Mike Wheeler, president of Hawkins Middle AV Club."

Dustin plucked the headphones from Mike and placed them on his head.

"What are you doing?" Mike inquired.

Leaning over the microphone, Dustin said, "Hello, this is Dustin, and this is the secretary and treasurer of Hawkins Middle AV club. Do you eat kangaroos for breakfast?"

Mike laughed and Lucas hurried to pull the headphones from Dustin wanting to say something, too.

There was a knock on the door and Principal Russell Coleman stepped in with Chief Jim Hopper and Officer Phil Callahan waiting behind him.

Principal Coleman addressed Mr. Clarke, "Sorry to interrupt, but, uh, may I borrow Michael, Lucas, and Dustin?" He pointed at each in turn, and the boys stared up at him smiles slipping from their faces.

Crowded on a couch in the principal's office, the three friends spoke over one another with Hopper and Callahan sitting across from them in chairs, trying to discern information from the animated babble, Principal Coleman watching silently from his desk.

"Okay, okay, okay," interrupted Hopper. "One at a time, alright? You." He looked to Mike who nodded. "You said he takes what?"

"Mirkwood," said Mike.

"Mirkwood?" copied Hopper, clueless.

"Yeah."

Hopper glanced at Callahan, "Have you ever heard of Mirkwood?"

"I have not. That sounds made up to me."

"No, it's from *Lord of the Rings*," informed Lucas.

"Well, *The Hobbit*," corrected Dustin.

"It doesn't matter!" Lucas said sardonically.

"He asked!" came Dustin's retort.

Lucas pulled a mocking face and mimicked, "*He asked.*"

Mike, sitting between the bickering friends shouted, "Shut up guys!"

Hopper cut across them, "Hey, hey, hey! What'd I just say? One at a damn time. You." He looked to Mike again.

"Mirkwood," repeated Mike. "It's a real road. It's just the name that's made up. It's where Cornwallis and Kerley meet."

Hopper leaned back in his chair muttering quietly, "Yeah, all right, I think I know that."

"We can show you, if you want," Mike suggested quickly.

"I said that I know it!" said Hopper, louder.

Mike insisted, "We can help look."

"Yeah," said Dustin.

"No," said Hopper, firmly.

Talking over one another again the boys disagreed.

"We can help!"

"We know the area well!"

"No," recast Hopper. "No. After school you are all to go home. Immediately. That means no biking around looking for your friend, no investigating, no nonsense. Now this isn't some *Lord of the Rings* book-"

"*The Hobbit*," said Dustin again.

"Shut up!" snapped Lucas hitting Dustin from across Mike. Dustin hit him back and the two began to argue again while Mike sat annoyed between them.

Hopper leaned forward and said softly, "Do I make myself clear?" When they did not respond he stood, looming before them, and asked threateningly, "Do I make myself...clear?"

Intimidated, they nodded their affirmation.

"Yes, sir," said Mike and Dustin.

"Yeah," said Lucas.

---

*An American flag blew in the wind of a sunny autumn day. Joyce Byers treaded a trail through the woods behind her home toward a hut made*

*from an assortment of large branches tied together with thick twine. Two boards were nailed to the branches outside the hut. One board, nailed over the entrance consisting of a tattered sheet, carried the title Castle Byers in large yellow letters. The other, smaller board, held a painted message in the same yellow letters: All Friends Welcome.*

*Pressing her finger to a round cylinder near the frame, forming a makeshift doorbell, she called out, "Ring-a-ding-ding! Anybody home?"*

*"Password?" Will called back.*

*.*

*"Uh, Rada...Radaga...Radagast?"*

*"Yeah, you may enter."*

*Crouching through the entryway Joyce found her son sitting on a lumpy mattress surrounded by an array of old objects and art equipment.*

*"Thank you, sir," she sat opposite him on the other end of the mattress. "So, guess what? I got off early and...Ta da!" She whipped out a couple of movie tickets. "Poltergeist!"*

*Will sat a little straighter. "I-I thought I wasn't allowed to see it?"*

*"I changed my mind. As long as you don't have nightmares for a week."*

*Will quickly shook his head. "No, I won't. I don't get scared like that anymore."*

*"Oh yeah? Not even of clowns?"*

*"No," said Will.*

*"What about my witch?" Joyce said in a croaky, high-pitched voice, forming a hook with her index finger and circling the air in front of him.*

*"No, Mom..." said Will, warningly.*

*"Ooh," she made to tickle him.*

*Will half-amused, half-embarrassed, said, "I'm not five anymore!"*

"Will Byers," Joyce croaked. "I'm going to cook you up in my..."

"Stop! That's so stupid," Will laughed. "Mom!"

---

Back in present day, Joyce leaned into the small hut featured in her memory to find an empty mattress, dark and cold-looking. She visibly deflated as her hope dwindled of finding Will safe, whole, and near. She pulled her head out of the hut and searched the tree trunks around her feeling more frantic by the second.

Jonathan was calling out to the woods at large, "Will! Will!

"Will?" Joyce called too.

"Will? Will?" hollered Jonathan moving away.

"Will!" Joyce screamed.

As their unheard calls went out into the evening the sheet hanging from the entrance to *Castle Byers* blew in the wind.

"Where are you?" called Joyce desperately.

---

A hamburger sizzled as Benny Hammond stood over a grill. Flipping the burger he peered back at his strange guest.

Sitting across from the girl he placed a basket of fries and a hamburger sandwich before her. The girl snatched up the food and began to tear at it as if she had not eaten for days. She now wore a large yellow t-shirt which he had given her in place of her tattered hospital gown. She had taken it from him and, after gazing at it for a moment, she had stepped out of her gown with no concern for modesty. He had spun around at this point, unsure what to make of it.

He watched her take large bites from the burger, barely chewing her food at all.

"Geez. Your parents forget to feed you?" he asked. "Is that why you ran away?"

The girl neither looked at him nor did she answer, she just continued eating.

"They, uh...They hurt you? You went to the hospital, you got scared, you ran off, you wound up here, is that it?"

He searched her face for any indication if she was stressed by what he had said. She finally looked up at him, mouth bulging with food, but her silence persisted.

Stretching forward Ben took the burger from her and slid the basket away.

"Alright. I'll give this back all right? And you can have as much as you want." She stared, a piece of food dropping from her sealed lips. "All right? Maybe even some ice cream. But you gotta answer a few of my questions first, all right?"

Chewing what was left in her mouth she said nothing. "We got a deal?"

She only looked from him to the food and back. He tried a different tactic. "All right, let's start with the easy stuff. All right? My names Benny. Benny Hammond."

He held out his hand but she merely observed it, seeming confused.

"See? Like this. Here," he caught hold of her right hand and though she made to withdraw, startled, he managed to hold on.

Gently clasping her small hand in his large one he said delicately, "I got you. Don't worry, It's okay," and he shook her hand with his in greeting. "Nice to meet you, yeah. And you are?"

Nothing. He dropped his elbow to the table, still holding her hand, and sighed, at a loss. Noticing something on her left arm he turned it over so he could see. He glimpsed the tattooed number '011' before she snatched her arm away in alarm. He exhaled again, more baffled and troubled than ever.

"Eleven? What's that mean?" he asked. "What's it mean?"

"No," she said.

Benny almost jumped in surprise that he had actually broke through.  
"Well I'll be damned. She speaks. No? No what?"

No response.

"All right. I guess no more food, then."

He moved to carry the food away and with an anxious look the girl said, "Eleven."

He paused. "Yeah. What's it mean?"

She pointed at her throat and said again, "Eleven."

Frowning, Ben said, "All right then."

He gave her back the basket and chuckled as she went for it immediately. "Here you go. Take it easy, take it easy."

He gazed around his restaurant feeling deeply disturbed.

Several minutes later he stood in the kitchen, speaking to a woman on the phone, having looked up the social services hotline number in the phonebook he kept under a counter. "Yeah, look, all I know is that she's scared to death. Yeah, I think maybe she's been abused or...kidnapped or something." He listened to the woman as he watched the girl finish her meal through the serving window. "Yeah, it'd be great if someone would come by. Yeah, we're at 4819 Randolph Lane...Yeah Randolph."

Outside of the kitchen the girl ate her fries, having finished the burger. She looked up as she took notice of a noisy fan rattling from across the room. She glared at it silently for a moment when suddenly the fan stopped altogether as if someone had unplugged it. Looking back down she calmly continued eating in peace.

---

Two police cars sped down a road running through the forest just past Hawkins Lab.



Strolling from his truck Chief Hopper popped a few prescription pills as Callahan called out, "Will Byers?"

"Will!" yelled Powell

"Will Byers!"

"Come on, kid!"

"Will!"

Hopper paused as he noticed something at the bottom of a small bank off the side of the road.

"Hey!" he called to the others. "I got something."

He jogged down and stood before a bike left abandoned in the leaves.

"That his bike?"

Disconcerted, he paced away looking around. "Yeah, he must have crashed."

Callahan searched the ground as well. "You think he got hurt in the fall?"

"Not so hurt he couldn't walk away. Bike like this is like a Cadillac to these kids. He would've walked it home." Stepping back he bent and picked the bike up still searching the area for evidence.

---

In a dim room at Hawkins Lab sat men and women, each with a pair of headphones, listening to radio to phone calls.

"...get off work if I win."

"Oh, Friday I'm supposed to..."

"...but we will cover whatever the damages are to your property. It's just, um..."

"That's for sure."

The agents listened sedately, some taking notes, others merely following the conversations while smoking cigarettes.

The voice of Joyce Byers could be heard over a line. "Is Lonnie there?"

"Lonnie isn't here right now," answered a woman.

"Can you please put him on-"

"I told you Lonnie's not here."

"Who is this?" asked Joyce, vexed.

"His girlfriend, Cynthia," said the woman.

"Cynthia," repeated Joyce.

Jonathan looked up at his mother from over the coffee table in their living room.

"Who the hell is this?" asked Cynthia.

"Cynthia, this is Joyce."

"Who?"

"Joyce - Lonnie's ex-wife. I really need to speak to him."

"Lonnie's not here."

As Joyce spoke to the woman on the phone, Jonathan meticulously finished the heading, with the words 'Have You Seen Me?', across the top of a blank sheet of paper, having used a ruler to draw out the lines for the header.

"Can you please put-" Joyce continued.

"Why don't you call back later?" said Cynthia on the opposite line.

"No! No, not later. Now! Can-" but the line disconnected and Joyce slammed the phone back onto the wall. "Bitch!"

"Mom!" said Jonathan.

"What?"

"You have to stay calm."

Joyce chuckled humorlessly, glanced at a scrap of paper in her hand, picked up the phone and dialed the number written upon it.

This time she got the answering machine, "Hey, you've reached Lonnie. Leave a message and I'll holler right back at ya."

"Lonnie, some teenager just hung up on me," she stated. "Will is...is missing. I don't know where he is, I need...I just need you to call me back, please, just...call-" but the machine had beeped and she was disconnected. She slammed the phone down twice onto its housing. "Damn it! Damn it!"

Jonathan stared out of the living room window as a vehicle approached from outside. "Mom?"

"What?"

"Cops," he said simply.

Dashing outside they found Hopper coming around from the back of his truck carrying Will's bike, but Will did not appear. Joyce felt an overwhelming despair take root in her heart.

Inside the house Joyce interrogated Hopper, "It was just lying there?"

Hopper inspected the small home. "Yeah." He pointed down the hall to the bedrooms and said, "Cal?" Powell nodded and went to search the rooms as Hopper patrolled through the rest of the home.

"Did it have any blood on it, or..." Joyce was asking.

"No, no, no, no, no. Phil?" he called for Callahan.

Jonathan spoke up, anguish boiling beneath the surface of his thoughts, "If you found the bike out there, why are you here?"

"Well, he had a key to the house, right?"

"Yeah," said Jonathan.

"So...maybe he came home," he said, vaguely.

"Y-you think I didn't check my own house?" asked Joyce, peeved.

"I'm not saying that," He caught sight of a small dent in the wall by the back door. "Has this always been here?"

"What? I don't know," Joyce replied. "Probably. I mean, I have two boys. Look at this place."

Hopper pulled the door open and held it against the wall, where it became clear that the knob had made the impression on the wall. "You sure?"

Joyce sighed heavily, obviously flustered.

Hopper heard barking from out back and stepping into the yard he knelt down to pet the Byers' dog who was yapping at the shed.

"Hey. Hey what's up with this guy, huh?" he questioned, but Joyce grabbed the dog's collar and pulled him away.

"Nothing," she said. "He's probably just hungry. Come on."

Hopper peered over at the shed as Joyce took the dog inside the house. Wandering forward he examined the area for signs of a struggle, something out of place, anything that would indicate Will had been there the previous night.

Entering the shed he flipped the switch to his right and a light bulb hanging from the ceiling flickered on. His attention on the work table, he discovered a box of bullets, open with its contents strewn across the table. Looking up at the wall of the shed he saw a gun rack but no shotgun. As he stepped over to investigate, the light of the shed shut off. Turning he squinted around the dark shed. A pile of wooden crates sat in a corner, some cracked in half. Grabbing a flashlight off a table he focused its beam across the wooden pile and, as he stepped forward, he distinctly heard some form of a squelching

noise. However, as he knelt down to hunt for the source the sound vanished and all was quiet.

The light to the shed flashed back on and a voice shouted, "Hey!"

Startled, Hopper jumped to his feet.

"Jesus!" he exclaimed.

"What are you deaf? I've been calling you. What's going on?" asked Callahan.

Without answering, Hopper exited the shed.

"Hello? Are you sure you're okay, Chief?" Callahan asked, following him to the house.

Forming a plan, Hopper said, "Listen. I want you to call Flo. I want to get a search party together, all right? All the volunteers she can muster." He handed the flash light to Callahan, and added, "Bring flashlights, too."

"Hey, you think we got a problem here?"

Hopper glanced back at him but did not reply.

---

"We should be out there right now. We should be helping look for him," Mike asserted over dinner as his family ate around him.

"We've been over this, Mike. The chief says-" said Karen, but her son cut across her.

"I don't care what the chief said!"

"Michael!" Karen warned.

"We have to do something. Will can be in danger."

"More reason to stay put."

"Mom!"

"End of discussion," she said with finality. Karen stared firmly at first Mike and then Nancy, as if daring her to argue, before looking to her husband imploringly, although he took no notice.

The family ate quietly for a moment until Nancy said, "So...me and Barbara are going to study at her house tonight. That's cool right?"

"No, not cool," Karen answered.

"What? Why not?"

"Why do you think? Am I speaking Chinese in this house? Until we know Will is okay, no one leaves," she stated again.

"This is such bullshit," blurted Nancy.

"Language," interjected Ted.

"So, we're under house arrest? Just because Mike's friend got lost on the way home from-" Nancy ranted.

Mike interrupted her, "Wait, this is Will's fault?"

"Nancy, take that back," said Karen.

"No!"

"You're just pissed off 'cause you wanna hang out with Steve," accused Mike.

Nancy gave her brother a dangerous look, warning him not to say more.

Roused, Ted asked, "Steve?"

"Who is Steve?" inquired Karen.

"Her new boyfriend!" Mike spouted quickly.

"You are such a douche-bag, Mike!" Nancy shouted at her brother.

"Language!" Ted hollered.

Groaning dramatically, Nancy stormed from the table as Mike snickered at his sister's hang-ups.

Karen called after her, "Nancy, come back. Come back!"

Looking scared little Holly stared up at her mother who told her, "It's okay. It's okay, Holly. Here have some juice, okay?"

"You see, Michael? You see what happens?" said Ted, knowingly.

"What happens when what? I'm the only one acting normal here! I'm the only one that cares about Will!" he yelled.

"That is really unfair, son," said Ted, looking down at his chicken. "We care." He took another bite.

Harassed, Mike too stomped away from the table.

"Mike," called Karen.

"Let him go," said Ted.

Karen turned to glare at her husband, "I hope you're enjoying your chicken, Ted," she said, biting.

Baffled, Ted asked, "What did I do?"

Picking Holly up, and taking her juice, Karen walked away as well.

"Hey. What'd I do?" asked Ted.

---

"Will!"

"Will Byers!"

"Will!"

"Will, we're here for you, bud!"

Beams from flashlights bobbed up and down as search volunteers combed the dark trees a mile from the Byers' home.

Sidling up to Chief Hopper, Mr. Clarke said, "He's a good student."

Turning Hopper said, "What?"

"Will. He's a good student," Mr. Clarke repeated. "Great one, actually. I don't think we've met. Scott Clarke. Teacher, Hawkins Middle. Earth and biology."

"I always had a distaste for science," admitted Hopper.

"Well, maybe you had a bad teacher," said Mr. Clarke, who firmly believed that any subject could be found interesting if it was taught with passion and love for the subject.

"Yeah, Ms. Ratliff was a piece of work," said Hopper.

Mr. Clarke chuckled, "Ratliff? You bet. She's still kicking around, believe it or not."

"Oh I believe it. Mummies never die, so they tell me," Hopper hesitated before continuing. "Sarah, my daughter,...galaxies, the universe, whatnot,...she always understood all that stuff. I always figured there was enough going on down here, I never needed to look elsewhere."

"Your daughter, what grade is she? Maybe I'll get her in my class."

"No, she, uh...She lives with her mom in the city," Hopper strolled away, saying over his shoulder, "Thanks for coming out, Teach. We really appreciate it."

Mr. Clarke paused as he watched Hopper's form move away.

"She died a few years back," said a woman searching nearby.

"Sorry?" asked Mr. Clarke.

"His kid," she answered. Mr. Clarke looked back at the shadow of Chief Jim Hopper, wondering what it must be like to search for a child knowing your own could never be found again.

---



Sitting alone in his family's basement, Mike stared at the pieces of Dungeons and Dragons which stood ready for the boys to continue upon their next campaign. The Demogorgon stood before Will's piece and he thought back to the night before.

Retrieving his radio he transmitted, "Lucas, do you copy? It's Mike. Lucas?"

"Hey, it's Lucas," came the reply.

"I know it's you. Say 'over' when you're done talking so I know when you're done. Over."

"I'm done. Over," Lucas said.

"I'm worried about Will. Over," Mike said quietly.

"Yeah," Lucas laid across his bed, radio in hand. "This is crazy. Over."

"I was thinking. Will could've cast Protection last night, but he didn't. He cast Fireball. Over."

"What's your point? Over."

"My point is... he could've played it safe, but he didn't. He put himself in danger to help the party," Mike explained. "Over."

Lucas thought for a moment of what Chief Hopper had said, and then of Will.

"Meet me in ten," he transmitted. "Over and out."

Shoving the antennas back into the radio, Mike packed a flashlight into his backpack. From around the side of his house he rode his bike ready to set out when he paused as he noticed Steve Harrington attempting to climb up to his sister's bedroom window. Steve stared back, but Mike merely rolled his eyes and took off. Steve resumed his perilous climb.

Nancy sat in her room thumbing through her flashcards when she heard a light tap on the window. Turning she spotted Steve who gestured for her to let him in. Shocked she slid the window up, where

Steve waited looking pleased with himself.

She whispered crucially, "What are you doing here? I told you on the phone, I'm under house arrest now."

"I figured we'd just study here," Steve said, simply.

"No. No way," objected Nancy.

"Oh, come on," he said. He climbed the rest of the way through her window saying, as he did, "I can't have you failing this test."

He stumbled a little on his way in but eventually stood before her looking pleased again. "What'd I tell ya? Ninja."

Nancy scoffed and closed the window, but she couldn't help thinking, as she did so, that Steve Harrington was actually standing in her bedroom.

---

Benny Hammond stood before a large sink washing the dishes with a hose, a cloth flung over his shoulder. He gazed over at Eleven sitting serenely on a countertop eating strawberry ice cream.

"You like that ice cream, huh?" he noted. The corners of her mouth twitched upward.

"Smile looks good on you," he said, and when she looked confused he explained, "You know, smile?"

He showed his teeth in a silly grin and a small smile appeared on her face.

Ben chuckled and turned back to his dishes, music playing faintly in the background. Eleven went back to enjoying her ice cream.

There was an unexpected knock on the door. Eleven snapped around at the sound, suddenly frightened. Looking back at Ben he read plain terror across her face.

"All right," he assured her. "You just sit tight. Whoever it is, I'll tell 'em to go away real quick, all right?"

Out in the dining area of his restaurant, Benny heard the knocking continue.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he murmured. Unlocking the front door, he opened it to find a middle-aged, blonde woman standing before him. "Hey, can I help you?"

"Hi, you must be Benny Hammond," she stated.

"I'm afraid I am," he said, quickly. "I'm afraid we're closed for the evening, too. So try back tomorrow morning."

"Connie Frazier. Social Services," she said.

"Ah, Social Services. My apologies," said Benny, and he opened the door a little wider. "I didn't expect you so soon. That's a heck of a drive."

"Not too bad this time of night."

"Hey, listen, I...I haven't told her that you were coming yet. I didn't want her running off again. She's a tad skittish."

"Children I work with usually are," said the woman.

"Right, right," Benny responded, thinking what a crying shame it was that there were any children at all damaged by the world deemed to care for them.

The woman peered over his shoulder, "So where is she?"

"Right. She's in the kitchen. Come on up. I'll introduce you."

"Thank you," stepping up into the restaurant behind Benny, the woman reached for something in her purse.

"Sorry again for trying to turn you away there," said Benny.

"It's fine," said the woman.

"You know, it's funny. Your, uh, voice sounds different on the-

Benny began to turn back toward the woman, but she had already

retrieved what she was searching for in her purse, and holding it level to Benny's temple she aimed with a calm coolness, and squeezed the trigger, killing Benny Hammond instantly with the sound of a silenced gunshot.

Eleven, watching through the serving window from the kitchen, gasped before hopping off the counter and racing for the back exit. Barefoot, in nothing but the t-shirt on her back she ran down the hall, skidding to a stop before two suited men pointing guns at her face.

Connie Frazier stood silently before the body of Benny Hammond as Dr. Brenner and several of his men entered the premises searching for the girl. The signal from the radio playing in the background was interrupted with static and they heard a shout and thud issuing from the back of the building. The static ceased and the radio music continued. Brenner rushed back to find both suited men lying on the floor unconscious, and no girl in sight.

Brenner hurried outside searching the edge of the trees for a sight of movement, but he spotted nothing.

---

Three friends rode their bikes down a dark road with headlights cutting through the blackness.

"Ah, man. This is it," said Lucas.

They stood over their bikes squinting into the woods, swallowed in darkness.

Dustin peered up into the sky. "Hey guys. You feel that?" he asked, wiping a small drop of rain from his cheek. "I think maybe we should go back."

"No," bossed Mike. "We're not going back. Just stay close. Come on. Just stay on channel six. Don't do anything stupid."

Dustin felt nervous, and a chill crept up his spine as thunder rumbled in the distance. Looking back through the trees, he saw Mike and Lucas already several paces ahead of him. "Hey, guys, wait up. Wait up!"

---

Steve held out a flashcard before him. "Which polymers occur naturally?"

"Starch and cellulose," answered Nancy.

"Mmm," Steve flipped through another card. "In a molecule of  $\text{CH}_4$ , the hydrogen atoms are spatially oriented towards the centers of-?"

"Tetrahedrons," Nancy said quickly.

He flipped the card over to check the answer before moving onto the next. "Wow. Jesus, how many of these did you make?"

"You said you wanted to help?" Nancy reminded him.

Steve thought for a moment. "How about this? How about...How about every time that you get something right, I have to take off an item of clothing. But everytime that you get something wrong..." his voice trailed off suggestively.

"Uh, pass," said Nancy, as a thrill raced through her.

"Oh, come on. Come on," needled Steve.

"No," she said.

Steve looked at the next card. "Come on. It'll be fun."

"No," she said, again, but Steve was already reading the next card.

"During fractional distillation hydrocarbons are separated according to their-"

"Melting point," blurted Nancy.

Checking the back, Steve said, "Ooh, it's boiling point."

Nancy shook her head. "That's what I meant."

"Yeah, that's not what you said," Steve told her, and he moved a little closer to her.

"No," she said, as her heart twittered maddeningly.

"No? Oh do you need... do you need help, or..." he moved in even closer. Nancy could feel his breath on her face.

"No," she repeated, but Steve kissed her and she felt herself fall back against her pillows. She moved her lips with his, and Steve leaned over her, wrapping his arm around her waist and pulling her closer. As they kissed Steve began to unbutton her blouse, his lips becoming more intense.

"Steve," Nancy said. "Steve come on." She pushed at him.

Steve asked with an innocent expression, "What?"

"Are you crazy? My parents are here."

Scanning the room Steve said, "That's weird I...don't see them."

He leaned back down and kissed her again, but she pushed him away as she sat up, feeling used.

"Was this your plan all along? To ... to get in my room and then..." she looked away as she buttoned her blouse back up, then forced herself to finish the thought, "get another notch on your belt."

"No. Nancy. No," said Steve.

"I'm not Laurie, or Amy, or Becky," she told him, thinking of all the rumors she'd heard, and been warned about, before going out with Steve Harrington.

"You mean you're not a slut," clarified Steve.

"That's not what I'm saying," said Nancy, not entirely sure why she felt ashamed.

"You know, you're so cute when you lie," Steve flirted.

"Shut up," she said, but she couldn't keep the smile forming on her face.

Steve grabbed her teddy bear off her bed and made a pouty face. In a high, solemn voice, he said, "Bad Steve. Bad. Don't do that to Miss

Nancy."

Smiling wider Nancy told him, "You're an idiot Steve Harrington."

"You are beautiful, Nancy Wheeler," he answered, looking into her eyes and setting her heart pounding again. Retrieving her flashcards, he read the next one, "Compared to the rate of inorganic reactions, the rate of organic reactions is generally..."

---

Joyce and Jonathan sat huddled together on the small couch in their living room, rain and thunder sounding around the small broken home. They were pouring over old family photos searching for one to use for Will's missing poster.

"Jonathan, wow. You took these? These are great," Joyce sniffed gazing at the beautiful images and moments her son had captured. "Wow, they really are. I know I haven't been there for you. I've-I've been working so hard and I ...just feel bad. I don't even barely know what's going on with you. All right? I am sorry about that."

Jonathan seemed to curl in on himself, and he could not contain the small sob that escaped him.

"Hey, what is it? What is it, honey?" Joyce held onto him, willing him to open up.

He sniffled, and said, "Nothing."

She leaned into him, not wanting him to carry this burden alone. "Tell me. Tell me. Come on. You can..."

"No...it's just...I should've been there for him.." Jonathan confessed.

"No. Oh no. You can't do that to yourself. This was not your fault. Do you hear me? He is...close. I know it. I-I-I feel it in my heart. You just have to...You have to trust me on this, okay?" Joyce pleaded with him to understand what she had known all day, that Will was alive and that he needed her.

Jonathan nodded, "Yeah."

Glimpsing a photo among those on the table, Joyce pulled it out. It was an image of Will with a bright, laughing smile. "Oh look at this. Look at this one. Look at this one," she laughed through her tears. "I mean, that's it, right?"

"Yeah," said Jonathan, laying his head upon her shoulder, something he had not done in years.

"That's it, that's the one," she repeated, gazing into Will's eyes with a painful longing to wrap him in her arms and never let go.

Her reverie was broken when the phone rang.

Leaping to her feet, she hurled herself at the phone. "Hello?"

She heard nothing but static. "Hello?" she asked again, yet still only heard static, like a radio in a tunnel. "Lonnie?"

"Dad?" Jonathan whispered, pained that the thought Lonnie had called could still somehow bring him hope.

"Hopper?" Joyce strived to distinguish sound through the static. In the background she heard what sounded like muffled breathing, and as soon as she thought this it seemed to grow louder.

"Who is this?"

The breathing continued, and suddenly a memory of Will, who at the age of five had woken from a nightmare and she had comforted him while his panicked breathing came out in small gasps as if building toward a blood-curdling scream, came to the forefront of her mind.

"Will? Will?" she clasped the phone to her ear, trying to discern speech in the static.

"It's Will. Mom, it's Will?" Jonathan stared at his mother in mounting horror as he watched her fall to pieces before his eyes.

Sobbing and trembling, Joyce asked again, "Who is this?" She couldn't hear the panicked breaths anymore but a low growling issued from the phone.



"What have you done to my boy?" yelled Joyce hysterically.

Jonathan stood close to his mother wanting to know what was happening, but also dreading what he might hear. "What? What?"

"Give me back my son!" screamed Joyce, beside herself. A sudden surge of electricity charred the phone in Joyce's hand and she dropped it with a scream as she was shocked.

Jonathan yanked the phone to his ear, and shouted, "Hello? Hello, who is this? Hello? Who is this?" But the phone was dead and he slammed it back onto its housing.

Joyce lost all composure. Her baby boy needed her, but there was nothing she could do, no one she could call for help. Like a violin with snapped strings, she was a useless instrument, her cries a mournful tune of loss and grief, fear and pain.

"Mom, who was it? Who was it, mom?"

"It was him!" she wept, a whirlwind of crushing agony. "It was him!"

"Look at me. Mom, was it Will?" Jonathan held her up, and without him she would surely have fallen to the floor.

Nodding, she sobbed and screamed, "Yes!"

"What did he say?"

"He just breathed! He just breathed!"

"And, was someone else there?" Joyce lifted the damaged phone hopelessly. "Mom, who was there? Who was it?"

"It was him! I know it was his breathing! I know it was his breathing!"

The storm outside thundered on, drowning the despair in the Byers' home.

---

Through the rain and thunder, three friends searched the woods with

their flashlights calling for their missing pal.

"Will! Will!" called Mike.

Lucas shouted, "Byers!"

"I've got your X-men 134!" hollered Dustin. "Guys, I really think we should turn back."

"Seriously, Dustin?" complained Lucas. "You wanna be a baby then go home already."

"I'm just being realistic, Lucas!" Dustin retorted.

"No, you're just being a big sissy."

"Did you ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad?" alluded Dustin. "And, we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And, we have no weapons or anything?"

"Dustin, shut up!" Mike commanded.

"I'm just saying does that seem smart to you?"

"Shut up! Shut up!" Mike repeated.

The boys paused looking around and they heard a rustling noise close by.

"Did you guys hear that?" asked Mike. They scanned the trees for the source of the noise when an even closer disturbance caused all three boys to spin around and gasp in shock. Shining their lights before them the beams fell a figure right before them. They stared dumbfounded at the child standing opposite them. The girl was drenched to the core, wearing nothing but an overly large t-shirt and a buzzed haircut.

### **3. Chapter 2 - The Weirdo on Maple Street**

#### **Chapter Two - The Weirdo on Maple Street**

The night stormed on as Eleven sat on a basement sofa wrapped, shivering, in Michael Wheeler's jacket, breathing hard. Mike, Dustin, and Lucas all stood staring down at her, wondering different things.

Mike asked her, "Is there a number we can call for your parents?"

"Where's your hair?" asked Dustin. "Do you have cancer?"

"Did you run away?" questioned Lucas.

Mike continued the interrogation, "Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"Is that blood?" asked Lucas, reaching toward her to remove Mike's jacket in order to view the dark stain on her shirt.

She drew away in alarm and Mike slapped Lucas' hand away.

"Stop it! You're freaking her out!" he accused him.

Gesturing at her, Lucas said, "She's freaking me out!"

"I bet she's deaf," suggested Dustin.

He clapped his hands loudly before her and she flinched away, frowning at him.

Dustin looked over and stated the obvious, "Not deaf."

"All right, that's enough, all right? She's just scared and cold," Mike told his friends. Why couldn't they see that she was harmless and very clearly scared?

Mike ran over to a laundry basket on top of the dryer and pulled out the outfit he wore the day before, which his mother had just laundered that morning. Thunder rumbled loudly outdoors, and Eleven flinched again squeezing her eyes shut in fear.

Dustin and Lucas stood staring down at her, in bewilderment.

Mike, brought the clothes over to the girl, holding them out for her.

"Here," he said. "These are clean. Okay?"

She took them slowly then, without uttering a word, she ran the fabric against her cheek, the boys watching, baffled. Setting the clothes aside, she shrugged Mike's jacket from her shoulders, stood up and grabbed the hem of her too-large shirt, ready to pull it off, except...

"No, no, no!" yelled Mike wildly, rushing forward to stop the girl from undressing.

Dustin and Lucas spun around to face the stairs instead of the girl.

"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God!" exclaimed Dustin, while Lucas muttered in shock.

Stammering, Mike pointed at the bathroom in the corner of the basement. "See over there? Th-that's the bathroom. Privacy. Get it?"

She did not seem to understand the vehemence of their reactions but nevertheless, she clutched the clothing to her chest and ambled slowly over to the restroom. She gazed at the ceiling as she entered and Mike attempted to close the door for her, but she threw out her arm and grasped the edge of the door, an anxious expression written across her face.

"You don't want it closed?" Mike asked.

"No," she answered.

Mike blinked in surprise, "Oh, so you can speak. Okay, well...um, how about we just keep the door..."he cracked the door, leaving a thin gap in which he could still see her and she could still see him, "...just like this. Is that better?"

"Yes," she said.

Mike left her there, and Eleven turned staring at the room around

her.

Bunched together, the boys discussed the issue before them.

Dustin, "This is mental."

"At least she can talk," Mike pointed out.

"She said "no" and "yes". Your three year old sister says more," Lucas griped..

"She tried to get naked," said Dustin.

"There's something seriously wrong with her. Like, wrong in the head," Lucas said emphatically.

"She just went like..." Dustin crossed his arms in front of him and swung them up as if removing an invisible garment. He knocked his hat off his head, and his jacket slid off his shoulders.

"I bet she escaped from Pennhurst," Lucas said knowingly.

"From where?" frowned Mike.

"The nuthouse in Kerley county."

"You got a lot of family there?" asked Dustin smirking.

"Bite me," shot Lucas. "Seriously though, think about it. That would explain her shaved hair and why she's so crazy."

"Why she went like..." Dustin again made the disrobing gesture.

"She's an escapee is the point. She's probably a psycho," continued Lucas.

"Like Michael Myers," said Dustin, his eyebrows raised.

"Exactly!" Lucas agreed, and Mike rolled his eyes. "We should've never brought her here."

"So you just wanted to leave her out in that storm?" Mike asked, angrily.

"Yes! We went out to find Will, not another problem."

"I think we should tell your mom," Dustin told Mike.

"I second that," voted Lucas.

"Who's crazy now?" Mike said, disbelieving.

Baffled, Lucas asked, "How is that crazy?"

"Cause we weren't supposed to be out tonight, remember?"

"So?"

"So if I tell my mom and she tells your mom, and your mom..." he gave Dustin a meaningful glance.

"Oh man," said Dustin, fearfully.

"...Our houses become Alcatraz," Lucas finished.

"Exactly. We'll never find Will," Mike said.

Dustin and Lucas gazed at one another, and Dustin repeated his disrobing gesture.

"All right, here's the plan," said Mike, taking command of the situation. "She sleeps here tonight."

"You're letting a girl-" started Dustin, but Mike cut across him, continuing.

"Just listen! In the morning, she sneaks around my house, goes to the front door and rings my doorbell. My mom will answer and know exactly what to do. She'll send her back to Pennhurst or wherever she comes from. We'll be totally in the clear. And tomorrow night, we go back out. And this time, we find Will."

He waited for their answer. He didn't see how they wouldn't agree, it was the perfect plan, and he was secretly quite pleased with himself for having come up with it. Lucas paused, glancing at Dustin, before agreeing, rather reluctantly. A few minutes later Dustin and Lucas

climbed the stairs to leave, and they watched as Mike handed Eleven a bright yellow blanket.

"Here you go," he was saying. "This is my sleeping bag."

"You really think she's psycho?" Dustin asked Lucas.

Lucas shook his head in disbelief at Mike, "Wouldn't want her in my house."

He ran up the rest of the steps and left. Dustin watched Lucas go before turning back to gaze down at Mike and the strange girl.

"Mental," he muttered, before he too, left.

The boys had created a sort of makeshift den for Eleven, using a large quilt laid over the tops of chairs against the far basement wall. For a bed they had pulled cushions from the sofa, and they had used boxes and other various large items to block Eleven from view in between the legs of the chairs. Eleven had spread the bright, yellow sleeping bag Mike had given her over the sofa cushions.

Mike looked at her and said, "Hey, um, I never asked your name."

Looking down into her lap, Eleven slid the left sleeve of Mike's sweatshirt up just below her elbow and showed him the tattooed number on the underside of her forearm.

Forgetting to check himself, he reached out to touch the small marking on her arm, asking, "Is that real?"

She quickly snatched her arm away, glaring at him.

"Sorry, I've just...never seen a kid with a tattoo before," he apologized. "What's it mean? Eleven?"

She pointed at herself.

"That's your name?"

She nodded.

"Eleven. Okay. Um, well, my name's Mike. Short for Michael. Maybe we can call you "El"? Short for Eleven," suggested Mike.

She nodded, again.

"Um, well, okay.. 'Night, El," said Mike.

"Night, Mike," she said, in a very quiet voice.

Mike stood up and pulled the blanket down to hide her from view as she lay back on the cushions. Hesitating at the bottom of the steps, he stared at Eleven's den wondering if what Lucas said had any truth to it, but something inside him, something he didn't quite understand and would never mention to the other boys in case they made fun of him, told him she was not a danger to them. He turned off the basement light, and went upstairs to get ready for bed.

Alone among her blankets and with a nightlight in the wall behind her, Eleven lay silently, listening to the thunder and trembling in fear.

---

Outside of the Byers' home, a man from the electric company rose up the length of a utility pole on a truck lift.

"All right Mom. Breakfast is ready," said Jonathan, who had made breakfast for Joyce and himself. He went to set a plate of toast and scrambled eggs before the distraught woman.

"What? No be careful of the poster," she hastily pulled Will's missing poster off the table and set it aside in a safe place.

"Yeah, okay. All right," Jonathan said, and set the plate down in front of her once the poster had been moved.

Joyce shook her head at the food, "I can't eat."

"I just need you to eat, Mom."

"Listen. Listen, the Xerox place opens in, like, 30 minutes," she said, distracted.



"Yeah."

"...and I don't want you to go alone,..."

"No I know. I told you, I got it," Jonathan could feel his mother unraveling again.

"...so I'm gonna have Karen take you, 'cause I should be here," she looked up at him.

"Okay, okay," he assured her.

"We need to make, what, 200, 300 copies? How much is a copy?"

"Yeah, okay. Okay, Mom. Mom?"

"...ten cents? If we-ten cents-" She began reaching for her purse pulling out all the money she had. Jonathan placed his hands over hers.

"Mom. Mom. Mom! You can't get like this, okay?"

Joyce put her head in her hand, whimpering, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay," he assured her, when there was a knock on the front door. Joyce quickly put out her cigarette and hurried to answer it. Hopper stood waiting.

"We've been waiting six hours," Joyce complained.

"Yeah, I know, I came as soon as I could," Hopper answered, exhausted.

"Six hours," she repeated.

"A little bit of trust here, all right?" said Hopper, as he entered the threshold. "We've been searching all night. Went all the way to Cartersville."

"And?"

"Nothing."

"God," she put her hand over her mouth in horror, turning away from Hopper and looking back at Jonathan, who had no idea what to say.

"Flo says you got a phone call?" Hopper asked.

"Oh yeah," she quickly pointed at the phone and planted herself next to Jonathan watching as Hopper picked up the phone, examining the charred markings.

"Storm barbequed this pretty good," Hopper stated.

"Storm?" Joyce repeated, disbelieving.

"What else?"

"You're saying that that's not weird?"

"No it's weird," Hopper placed the phone back on the wall.

"Can we, like, trace who made the call? Contact the-" Jonathan asked, but Hopper interrupted.

"No, it doesn't work like that," he glanced down at his feet, already knowing how this was going to go, before he asked, "Now, uh, you're sure it was Will? Because Flo said you just heard some breathing."

"No. it was him. It was Will," Joyce's voice cracked with emotion. "And he was s-scared. And then something-"

"It was probably just a prank call. It was somebody trying to scare you," Hopper tried to explain.

"Who would do that?" questioned Jonathan.

"Well, this thing's been on TV, brings out all the crazies, you know. False leads, prank calls, uh..."

"No, Hopper," Joyce said forcefully. "It was not a prank. It was him."

Cynical, Hopper started, "Joyce."

"Come on! How about a little trust here?" vented Joyce. "What you think I'm-I'm making this up?"

"I'm not saying that you're making it up," Hopper stated, seriously. "All I'm saying is it's an emotional time for you."

"And you think I don't know my own son's breathing? Wouldn't you know your own daughters?" Joyce demanded vehemently.

Hopper stared down at Joyce and his lips pulled together tight, and he looked furious. Joyce turned away half-ashamed. Hopper peered down at the floorboards waiting for the hot wave of anger to pass, and when it didn't he paced away from her.

Forcing some calmness into his voice, he asked. "You hear from, uh, Lonnie yet?"

"No," Joyce responded.

"It's been long enough. I'm having him checked out," he swiftly placed his hat back onto his head and left the house, Joyce calling after him.

"Oh, come on. You're wasting your time!"

Halting outside of his truck Hopper took a couple of pills from an unlabeled prescription bottle and popped them into his mouth.

Jogging after him, Jonathan panted, "Hey, Hopper. Hopper. Let me go."

Sounding vexed, Hopper turned to face the young man, "I'm sorry?"

"To Lonnie's. You know, if-if Will's there, it means he ran away. And if he sees the cops, he'll think he's in trouble. He'll...he'll hide. You know, he's good at hiding," Jonathan explained.

Placing a cigarette between his lips Hopper put his pack back into his breast pocket and answered Jonathan, feeling some of that rage bubbling to the surface.

"Yeah? Well cops are good at finding," He seized Jonathan's arms, like he might shake the boy, make him rattle. "Okay?"

He pointed at the house, "Stay here with your mom."

Jabbing Jonathan with his fist, he turned and said, "She needs you." Then, he pulled himself into his truck and sped away as Jonathan stared after him.

---

Three waffles leapt out of a toaster and Mike hurriedly stuffed one into his jacket pocket.

Sitting around the dining table between his sisters, Mike shoved his food into his mouth trying to eat as quickly as possible. Karen and Nancy watched him, befuddled.

"Slow down, Mike," said Nancy. "That's disgusting."

Miffed, Mike turned and glared at her, "Do a lot of studying last night?"

"Yeah, actually, I did."

"What was your test on again? Human anatomy?"

Nancy raised her eyebrows in alarm and warning before kicking his chair. His chair shifted and then he kicked hers back.

Looking up sharply, Karen asked her children, "Hey, what's going on?"

"Nothing," they said simultaneously.

Down in the basement Eleven sat on her cushions in the den fiddling with a radio which emitted nothing but static. The blanket hiding her from view was lifted away and Mike crouched in front of her.

"Hey, you found my *Supercomm*. Pretty cool, huh?" said Mike. "I talk to my friends with it. Mostly Lucas, 'cause he lives so close. Signal's pretty weak."

He laughed, then pulled the waffle out of his pocket, delivering it to her. "Got you breakfast."

She took the waffle, without a word, and bit into it.

"So listen. This is gonna sound a little weird, but I just need you to go out there," he pointed up at the ceiling, "then go to the front door and ring the doorbell. My mom will answer and you'll tell her that you're lost and that you need help. But whatever you do, you can't tell her about last night or that you know me. Understand?"

She merely stared, chewing her waffle. "Really, it's no big deal. We'll just pretend to meet each other again. And my mom, she'll know who to call."

"No."

"No?" Mike repeated, blankly.

Eleven shook her head, and said again, "No."

"No...you don't want my mom to get help?" She shook her head again. "You're in trouble, aren't you? Who...Who are you in trouble with?"

"Bad," whispered Eleven.

"Bad? Bad people?" She nodded. "They want to hurt you? The bad people?"

She pointed her index and middle finger at her head like a gun, then at Mike. A chill ran through him.

Lowering her hand, Eleven asked, "Understand?"

Karen hollered in the distance, "Michael, where are you? We're going to be late. Let's go!"

Jumping back Mike said, "All right? I'll - I'll be back. Just stay here, okay? Stay here."

He replaced the blanket over the entrance to her den and Eleven listened as his steps receded from the basement.

---

Strolling quickly around a corner, followed closely by Connie Frazier and a man, Dr. Brenner quickly donned a business tunic over his shirt and tie.

The man was asking, "When was this?"

"Last night," replied Frazier. "Less than two miles away."

"And the boy?"

This time, Brenner answered, peering at his watch. "Still missing."

In a room filled with panels and audio/visual equipment Dr. Brenner wore a set of headphones and listened to a recording of Joyce talking to Florence, the secretary at the sheriff's station, over the phone.

"It was my son," Joyce was saying. "I-I know it. And I...I heard something else."

"Something else?" asked Flo.

"Yeah, it was like, uh, some kind of animal. I don't-I don't know. Just please tell Hop to hurry."

---

Over a leaf-strewn ground, volunteers continued to search and shout, "Will! Will Byers!"

"Will Byers!"

"Will!"

Officers Callahan and Powell shouted, leading the search. Hopper, coming over to where they search, called out.\

"Hey! Anything?"

Callahan shook his head, "You?"

"No," Hopper replied. "Nothing but a dead phone."

"Joyce?" Callahan asked as he and Powell huddled around Hopper as the volunteers continued searching for Will.

"About one step from falling off the edge."

"She's been a few steps for a while now, hasn't she?" conjectured

Powell.

Hopper glowered at him. "Kid's missing, man. Show a little class."

Twisting around, Hopper addressed the volunteers loudly, "All right. Come on, let's go! We got a lot of ground to cover."

"The chief and her, they've screwed before, huh?" wondered Callahan.

Powell smirked in response and yelled out, "Will!"

Following, Callahan asked, "That a 'yeah' or did they..." No answer.

Giving up, Callahan yelled, "Will!"

---

"Hey, wait up!"

A girl ran over to catch up with her friend as she walked towards Hawkins High School, along with several other students heading to their first morning class.

Along a busy corridor Barb strolled next to Nancy reading from a flashcard, "When alpha particles go through gold foil, they become..."

"Unoccupied space," Nancy answered.

Barb, who had flipped the card to peer at the back, nodded. "A molecule that can-Hey!" She yelled as Steve snatched the card right out of her hand. She lurched back as Tommy H. stuck his finger in ear and gave a wet willy. She wiped her ear on her shoulder.

"I don't know! I think you've study enough, Nance," Steve said.

"Steve-" began Nancy.

"I'm telling you, you know, you got this. Don't worry," he said, firmly. "Now, on to more important matters. My dad has left town on a conference and my mom's gone with him, 'cause, you know, she doesn't trust him."

"Good call," Tommy smirked.

"So are you in?" Steve continued.

Nancy asked, puzzled, "In for what?"

"No parents? Big house?" said Carol, rolling her eyes.

"A party?" said Nancy, surprised.

"Ding ding ding!" mocked Carol. Tommy laughed.

"It's Tuesday," Nancy pointed out, embarrassed and uncomfortable.

Tommy ridiculed her, "It's Tuesday. Oh my-" Steve nudged him with his elbow, and Tommy broke down laughing with Carol.

Smirking, Steve said, "Come on. It'll be low key. It'll just be us. What do you say? Are you in or are you out?"

Feeling nettled and awkward, Nancy tried to think of a way to decline without Tommy and Carol making fun of her, "Um..."

But Carol had become distracted. "Oh God. Look," she said.

"Oh God, that's depressing," said Steve, looking over Nancy's head. She turned to see what they were staring at and noticed Jonathan Byers pinning a missing poster of Will onto the school bulletin board. A wave of pity washed over her.

"Sh-should we say something? Nancy asked the others.

"I don't think he speaks," said Carol, tenderly.

"How much you want to bet he killed him?" Tommy asked, quaking with humor.

Steve pushed Tommy, "Shut up."

Nancy looked back at Jonathan feeling sorry for him. No one ever talked to him, and it was often remarked upon that he didn't seem to have any friends. But she had seen him with his brother and if he had had one friend it would have been Will. Ignoring the others, she walked over to him.



"Hey," she said, and Jonathan looked at her, surprised.

"Oh, hey," he said.

"I just..." she struggled to find something comforting to say. She looked at the picture of a smiling Will; he looked so young and bright. "I wanted to say, you know, um...I'm sorry about everything."

Jonathan glanced behind her at the others watching them.

"Everyone's thinking about you," she said, and Jonathan nodded. "It sucks."

"Yeah," he said.

"I'm sure he's fine. He's a smart kid," she said, and she meant it. Will always seemed to be the reasonable one of her brothers friends. The one least likely to do something stupid without thinking it out first. The bell rang over their heads and she hurriedly said, "I have to go. Chemistry test."

"Yeah," said Jonathan, again.

"Good luck!"

"Thanks," Jonathan watched as she trotted away with her friends. From the loudspeaker high on the wall issued the principal's voice.

"Attention , faculty and students," she said, and Jonathan walked to the exit behind him leaving the school. "At eight p.m. tonight, there will be an assembly on the football field in support of Will Byers and his family. All are encouraged to attend. Volunteer sign-ups for search parties are still available in the office."

---

Over at Hawkins Middle School, Lucas and Dustin placed their books on their respective desks as students filed into Mr. Clarke's class, seating themselves and removing textbooks from bags.

Dustin gawked at Mike's empty desk. "Oh, this is weird. He's never this late."

"I'm telling you, his stupid plan failed," said Lucas.

"I thought you liked his plan,"

"Yeah, but obviously it was stupid, or he'd be here," pointed out Lucas.

"If his mom found out a girl spent the night-"

Lucas finished the thought, "He's in deep shit right about now."

Tapping Lucas' arm, Dustin asked, "Hey, what if she slept naked?"

Lucas closed eyes. "Oh my God, she didn't," he quarreled.

"Oh, if Mrs. Wheeler tells my parents..."

"No way. Mike would never rat us out," Lucas said, confidently.

"I don't know," fretted Dustin.

"All that matters is, after school, the freak will be back in the loony bin, and we can focus on what really matters, finding Will," he said with finality.

---

Down the street from the Wheeler home a car passed a grove of trees from which Mike rode out from behind atop his bike. Peddling down the road he pulled up to his house.

Less than five minutes later he was showing Eleven around his home. "You want anything to drink?" he asked her. "We have OJ, skim milk...What else? Um...We have..."

Passing by the sitting room Eleven walked around a wooden box with a shiny glass side, concaved, and facing outward. Sitting on top were long antennae..

"Oh, this is my living room," said Mike. "It's mostly just for watching TV. Nice, right? It's 22-inch. That's, like, ten times bigger than Dustin's..."

She pivoted away no longer interested. Stepping up on the chimney seat she held on to the mantelpiece to gaze at the family photos. Running her finger over the glass of a framed picture of Nancy, she said, "Pretty."

Mike shrugged indifferent, "I guess. That's my sister Nancy," she walked along the edge of the chimney seat like it was a balance beam and peered at the other people in the photos. As she did Mike told her who they were. "And that's baby Holly. And those are my parents. What are your parents like? Do they live close?"

Eleven stepped down and circled the recliner chair.

"That's our La-Z-boy," he laughed, as she squeezed the fabric of the chair, feeling it against her skin. "It's where my dad sleeps. You can try it if you want."

She stepped around, hesitantly, and he reassured her, "Yeah. It's fun."

She seated herself into the large soft chair and Mike knelt on the floor to her right. Not wanting to spook her, he caught her eye and said, "Just trust me, okay?"

She nodded and Mike pulled the lever on the side of the chair and the footrest kicked out from under her legs until she was lying back. She let out a small laugh and Mike smiled.

"See? Fun right?" Mike pushed the footrest back into place, pulling the back of the chair back up so Eleven was seated upright again. "Now you try."

She reached over the side and pulled the lever once again. The footrest jumped back out and they both laughed.

---

Down a scenic roadway, Jonathan drove his mother's car, rock music blaring loudly from the car stereo. The song ended and the next one began and Jonathan glanced down at the stereo thinking of will.

*Darling, you got to let me know*

*Should I stay or should I go?*

*Jonathan and Will bobbed their heads in time with the music.*

*"You like it?" Jonathan asked.*

*"Yeah, it's cool," Will said, smiling brightly.*

*"All right, you can keep the mix if you want," he told his little brother.*

*"Really?" asked Will.*

*"Yeah, really. All the best stuff's on there. Joy Division, Bowie, Television, The Smiths...It'll totally change your life," Jonathan smiled, and Will smiled back, nodding.*

*"Yeah, totally."*

*Outside of the little bedroom they could hear their mother on the phone. "Where the hell are you, Lonnie? I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it." the yelling became indistinct, and Jonathan pictured his mother pacing away from the wall holding the phone and walking around the corner from where it was mounted. Will glanced at the bedroom door looking worried. They heard what Joyce shouted next. "This is ridiculous! I'm so sick of your excuses!"*

*One day is fine and next is black*

*Jonathan lowered the volume on the stereo.*

*"He's not coming, is he?" It was more a statement than a question, and that's what enraged Jonathan most.*

*"Do you even like baseball?" Jonathan asked Will.*

*"No, but..." he shrugged. "I don't know. Well.. It's fun to go with him sometimes."*

*"Come on. Has he ever done anything with you that you actually like? You know, like the arcade or something?"*

*He shrugged again. "I don't know."*

*"No, all right. He hasn't," Jonathan told him. "He's trying to force you to*

*like normal things. And you shouldn't like things because people tell you you're supposed to. Okay? Especially not him." Will nodded, and Jonathan thought about how he always seemed to get Will to agree with him about everything. "But you like The Clash? For real?"*

*Will smiled, "For real. Definitely."*

*Raising the volume again, Jonathan and Will nodded their heads to the music and Jonathan's hands beat out a rhythm on an invisible drum as they lost themselves in the music, carrying them far away from their troubles.*

*Should I cool it or should I blow?*

*So you gotta let me know*

*Should I stay or should I go?*

However, as Jonathan drove past a sign reading 'Leaving Hawkins Come Again Soon', he found that even music could not carry him away from what troubled him now.

---

As the town bell tower rang, birds fluttered off into the sky, and down on the street Joyce sped into the parking lot of the general store. Entering the shop in haste, she barely registered the Christmas tune playing over the speaker as she began searching along the aisles.

Her employer, Donald, hurried over. "Joyce, I wasn't expecting you today. I brought Jeffrey in to cover."

"I-I-I'm not here to work," she said, distractedly, looking over the shelves. "I...the storm last night...I...I need a new phone." She shrugged in a defeated way looking to Donald for help.

Moments later the cash register rang and Donald said brightly, "Okay, that looks like twenty-two dollars and fifty-six cents."

Joyce stammered awkwardly, "Uh, yeah, you know, uh...I gave Jonathan all my money for, for the copies for the posters. Uh, I need an advance."

Donald paused for a brief moment before nodding, "Yes, well, of course. Of course."

"Thank you," Joyce mouthed, but after seeing the amount he had written down she added, "Yeah, uh, I was thinking , uh, two weeks?"

Donald looked up at her, and his pause was lengthier this time around. "Um...Yes, I understand, but, you know, I have to pay Jeffrey for covering-"

Joyce interrupted him, "Donald. I've been here ten years, right? Have I ever called in sick or missed a shift once? I've-I've worked , uh, Christmas Eve and Thanksgiving," her voice broke as it so often did these days. "I don't know where my boy is. He's gone. I don't know if I'm...gonna ever see him again, if he's hurt...I, uh...," she nodded and continued firmly, "I need this phone and two weeks advance."

When Donald nodded and bent to pencil in the amount, she tacked on, "And a pack of Camels."

---

Back at the Byers' home a man wearing a blue jumpsuit knocked on the front door, but no one answered. He peered through the window of the living room, and upon seeing no one he pulled out a radio and transmitted, "We're all clear."

"Copy that," came the transmitted reply.

On the lawn of the property sat a white van with the emblem and heading of Hawkins Power and Light. The side door slid back and from within stepped several men fully clad in white hazmat suits and long black gloves. The last to exit the van was Dr. Brenner. The men spread across the property each carrying equipment. Several held devices in which they used to scan the ground, house, trees, and any objects they came across, a beeping issuing from the equipment as they did so. Brenner entered the shed in the backyard, while one of the men walking with him scanned the inside area. The beeping grew faster until they came across what appeared to be the source of the device's alarm. A sort of slimy substance oozing on the wall of the shed.

Staring at it, Brenner said, "Extraordinary."

---

Up in his bedroom, Mike placed a miniscule figure of Yoda from Star Wars on the surface of his desk and grunted, "Ready are you? What knows you of ready? His name's Yoda," he told Eleven. After showing her through the rest of the house they had made their way upstairs where he had let her peer around at each room in turn until they came to his.

"He can use the Force to move things with his mind," he added, mysteriously. "Like this. Whoosh!" He shoved several items onto the floor with his arm, but held Yoda aloft with his opposite hand, as if the little figure had wrecked his desk. Eleven looked away however, disinterested, and as Mike picked up a model of a tyrannosaurus rex Eleven stood up and walked off. "Oh, this is my dinosaur, Rory. Look, he has a speaker in his mouth so he can roar."

Rory let out a screeching roar, but as Mike followed her progress he saw that she had taken notice of his science fair awards on his dresser.

Joining her, Mike said, "Oh, these are all my science fair trophies. We got first every year. Except for last year when we got third. Mr. Clarke said it was totally political."

Their most recent trophy included a small plaque reading 'Hawkins Middle School Team Problem Solving Champions', and sitting next to the trophy was a photo of Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Will, holding up their prize, flushed with excitement over their victory.

Eleven's breathing grew heavier, and she paled as she stared into the faces of the image. Holding out her hand she pointed at one of the boys in the picture. She pointed directly at Will.

Shocked, Mike asked her, "You know Will? Did you see him? Last night? On the road?" But before she could answer they heard a vehicle approaching from outside Mike's window. Rushing over, he peered down at the driveway, before turning back and seizing Eleven's arm.

"We gotta go," he said, hastily. They hurried down the steps, but after turning the corner, Mike saw his mother had already entered the house, her back to him, closing the door with Holly astride her hip, less than ten feet away.

Karen was speaking to Holly, "I bought pizza and macaroni."

"Okay," said Holly.

"Okay," repeated Karen, but she turned and stared up at the ceiling. Mike had stomped back up the stairs, dragging Eleven with him. "Ted? Is that you?"

"Just me, Mom!" shouted Mike as he hurled back toward his room.

"Mike? What are you doing home?"

"One second!" he hollered before closing his door and leaping over to his closet. Opening it to reveal the mess inside he turned to Eleven. "In here. I'll be right back, okay?"

She stared at the mess looking very uncertain. "Please, you have to get in, or my mom, she'll find you. Do you understand? I won't tell her about you. I promise."

"Promise?"

"It means something that you can't break. Ever," Mike explained.

"Michael?" Karen called, again.

"Please?" Mike pleaded.

Looking extremely nervous Eleven slowly entered the closet and Mike shut her inside. Almost instantly her breathing grew labored. She shut her eyes tight as she felt the familiar tension in her chest, as if her heart was squeezing upon itself. The echo of her own cries ringing in her ears.

"Pop!"

*Eleven's legs flailed wildly as she was carried by her arms down a brightly*



*lit hall by two men wearing white trousers and shirt with black belt and shoes. Eleven wore only a hospital gown.*

*Trying to stare back down the corridor behind her Eleven twisted and thrashed as she shouted, "Papa!"*

*From down the hall, Dr. Brenner stepped out of a room to watch as Eleven was carried away. He did and said nothing, just watched the struggling girl silently.*

*"Papa! No! Papa!" They rounded a corner, and she could no longer see Papa. She screamed all the more ecstatic and she thrashed violently.*

*"No! No! No!"*

*But regardless of how hard she tried to throw the men off they were too strong for her, and they tossed her, none too gently, into an empty windowless room only about five feet wide and seven feet long. She scrambled to her feet as fast as she could, but the men had already slammed the door shut, leaving her in solid blackness, and so she pounded upon it screaming as loud as she could.*

*"Papa! Papa!" with both fists now she pummeled the door, willing Papa to hear her, to have mercy, to let her out. "Papa!"*

*She broke down into pitiful sobs, "Papa! Papa!"*

*The weeping overtook her and she could only mouth her calls for Papa.*

*"Papa," she said, weakly. But giving up hope she stumbled to the back wall of the room, and feeling the corner she slid down it crying as she hugged her knees to her chest. Her heart pounding and squeezing painfully. Her breaths came in gasps for air she feared would run out.*

*In Mike's closet, Eleven slid down the wall, crying silently.*

*Downstairs Mike sat upon the living room couch next to his mother.*

*"I just... I don't feel good," he was saying. "I woke up and my head, it really hurt bad, and my throat was all scratchy, and I wanted to tell you, but the last time I told you I was sick you made me go to school anyway, and-"*

"Michael," Karen interrupted his lie.

"Yeah?" he asked, nervously.

"I'm not mad at you," she said.

"No?" he asked, surprised.

"No, of course not," she scooted closer and sighed. "All this that's been going on with Will, I can't imagine what it's been like for you. I just..." she looked down and therefore, did not notice Mike's eyes shift guiltily to the floor and back. "I want you to feel like you can talk to me. I never want you to feel like you have to hide anything from me. I'm here for you. Okay?" She smiled warmly at her son, and Mike nodded. Suddenly there was a thud from upstairs. "Is there someone else here?"

Forcing himself to look unworried, Mike shrugged and said, "No."

A minute later Mike re-entered his room, closing the door. He asked, "Eleven? Is everything okay? El?"

He opened the closet door to find Eleven crouched on the floor, her knees hugged tight to her chest, tears falling down her face. She peered up at him.

"Mike," she said.

Worried, Mike asked her, "Is everything okay?" and when she nodded. "Are you sure?"

Nodding again, Eleven smiled and said, "Promise."

---

Setting the box of her new telephone on the kitchen table, Joyce cut the package open and began tossing brown packing paper onto the floor as she pulled the components of the phone out from inside. Piecing it together she plugged it into the wall and tried to pace away to the living room, but the cord impeded her. So, stretching her arm out she grabbed the back of a flowery chair and spun it around. Sitting in it she used her feet to scoot herself and the chair closer to the kitchen. Then she set the phone on her lap and waited.

---

Along a cliffside overlooking Sattler Quarry, search volunteers roamed the area hollering for Will Byers.

A woman with her German shepherd passed by Officer Powell who bent to search some dead brush for evidence as he stalked by.

Hopper and Callahan stood on a rocky crevice overlooking the quarry. Callahan leaned over the side gazing down at the water.

"Whoa, whoa. Careful, careful. I need you alive for the next few days, at least," Hopper warned Callahan.

"Oh, hell, I could survive that," Callahan boasted, and Hopper laughed at him. "What? George Burness made the jump. And he was drunk as a skunk. He did it on a ten dollar bet."

"George is a liar. You make that jump from this height, that water turns into cement," he brought one palm down over the other and clapped his hands. "Hits you like a ton of bricks. Break every damn bone in your body."

Staring over the water again, Callahan muttered, "Nah."

"Chief, you copy?" came Flo over the radio.

"Yeah, Flo, talk to me," replied Hopper.

"Hey, Chief, we got a call from over at Benny's. I think you need to get there right away," she told him seriously.

Several minutes later Officer Powell clambered out of his police cruiser. A fire engine parked next to him. He sidled up to Hopper, who had just stepped from his truck, and they walked into Benny's Burgers, Benny Hammond's burger joint. Slumped across the surface of one of his tables was Benny's body. His bottom half was seated in the chair at the table, and a gun lay under his right hand. A bloody gunshot wound showed on his right temple, and flies swarmed over his body. Near the gun was an empty cigarette and a salt shaker lying on its side, its contents spilling out. Hopper circled the table staring down at the corpse.

"Ugh, Jesus!" exclaimed Callahan.

Looking to Hopper, Powell asked, "Suicide?"

"Mmm-hmm," Hopper answered.

"Missing kid. Suicide...you must feel like a big city cop again, huh, Chief?" Callahan said.

"Well, I mostly dealt with strangers back then. Benny was my friend."

A friend, whom he had known to be quite positive and joyful to be alive, he thought as he stared down at Benny, lost for words.

---

Jonathan drove down the street of a poor neighborhood, beat up cars parked in driveways, and shingles hanging loose from roofs. His music still played loudly from the stereo as he searched the numbered houses. Finding the one he wanted, he pulled over, and stepped out onto the wet pavement. His bag over his left shoulder he climbed up onto the porch of the house and peeked through the little window on the front door. He could hear the muffled sounds of a TV going.

Pounding on the door, he called out, "Hello?"

He banged again, and this time a young woman came scurrying around the corner. She opened the door, and he immediately smelt the bubble gum she was chewing as well as cigarette smoke and liquor.

"Yeah," she said. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah, is Lonnie around?" he said, sardonically.

"Yeah, he's out back. What do you want?"

He shoved past her, saying, "To look around."

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?" she shouted at his back.

"I'll be fast," he muttered.

"Hey!" she shouted, again.

"Hey, Will? Will!" He looked into a bedroom which he found to be empty. He tried another door, but it was locked, so he knocked loudly on it calling. "Will, you here? Will!"

No one answered and he continued on to the next room. He saw a messy bedroom but no Will. Backing out, he headed toward the living area to search for more places to check when, with a grunt, he felt himself being pinned roughly to the wall behind him. A disheveled, gray-haired man stood before him, stale alcohol and cigarette smoke on his breath.

He shoved the man away. "Get off!"

"Damn, you've gotten stronger," Lonnie said, tapping his chest.

"Will someone please explain what the hell is going on?" demanded Cynthia, angry and confused.

"Jonathan, Cynthia. Cynthia, this is Jonathan. My oldest."

Jonathan looked over at Cynthia who looked blankly at Lonnie and back to him.

Lonnie pulled Jonathan into a hug, "Come here."

"Get off me, man," he said, and he shoved his father away again.

---

Cruising down the road to the Wheelers' house Dustin and Lucas hurried to meet Mike. Inside his bedroom, Dustin closed the door, and turning, he and Lucas both stared dumbfounded at Eleven sitting on Mike's bed, a blanket across her lap.

"Are you out of your mind?" Lucas asked Mike.

"Just listen to me," began Mike.

"You are out of you mind!" Lucas said, apparently having made up his mind.

"She knows about Will," Mike blurted.

"What do you mean she knows about Will?" asked Dustin.

Mike snatched their victory photo Eleven had pointed at earlier, showing them. "She pointed at him, at his picture. She knew he was missing, I could tell."

"You could tell?" Lucas frowned, unconvinced.

"Just think about it," Mike interpreted. "Do you really think it was a coincidence that we found her on Mirkwood, the same place where Will disappeared?"

Glancing at Lucas, Dustin conceded, "That is weird."

Mike forged on, "and she said bad people are after her. I think maybe these bad people are the same ones that took Will. I think she knows what happened to him."

"Then why doesn't she tell us?" pressed Lucas, frustrated. He glared at Eleven, his gaze full of mistrust, and stalked closer. "Do you know where he is?" he grasped her shoulders tightly, "Do you know where Will is?"

Mike pulled him off her, yelling, "Stop it you're scaring her!" And, indeed, she did look frightened.

"She should be scared," Lucas retorted. "If you know where he is, tell us!" But she did not respond.

Furious, Lucas turned to Mike, "This is nuts. We have to take her to your mom."

"No!" Mike shouted. "Eleven said telling any adult would put us in danger."

"What kind of danger?" Dustin asked.

"Her name is Eleven?" Lucas said, frowning again.

Mike nodded. "El for short."

"Mike, what kind of danger?" urged Dustin, loudly.

"Danger danger!" Mike held up his index and middle fingers shaped like a gun, as Eleven had done, and pointed them at Dustin's head, and then at Lucas who slapped him away.

"No, no, no!" said Lucas, vehemently. "We're going back to plan A. We're telling your mom."

Lucas stomped over to the bedroom door, but though he opened it just fine, the door slammed with such force the toy figures on Mike's dresser hopped around from impact. Lucas, Mike, and Dustin all stared, bewildered, at the door before once again Lucas attempted to open it. Again, no sooner had the door parted with its frame, than it slammed back shut. This time with such strength that several items fell from the dresser to the floor.

Then, quite clearly, the bolt on the doorknob spun into a locked position, trapping them inside. Slowly, the boys turned back to see Eleven standing before them, glaring. A trickle of blood flowed from her left nostril.

"No," said Eleven, firmly.

---

In the distance of Lonnie's home, a forklift operated at a junkyard.

"Take a look at this beaut," Lonnie said, as he followed Jonathan out into the yard. A black Mustang sat idly in the grass. "Should've seen it when I got it. Took me a year, but it's almost done."

Jonathan opened the trunk and peered inside.

"Really?" Lonnie scoffed. "You want to check up my ass, too? I told you the same thing as I told those cops, he's not here and he never has been."

"Then why didn't you call mom back?" he demanded.

"I don't know, I just...I assumed she just forgot where he was," he said uncomfortably. "You know, he was lost or something. That boy never was very good at taking care of himself." He chuckled.

"This isn't some joke, all right?" Jonathan yelled, furiously. "There are search parties, reporters..."

"Hopper's not still chief, is he?" When Jonathan didn't answer, he said. "Tell your mother she's got to get you outta that hellhole. Come out here to the city. People are more real here, you know? And then I could see you more."

Jonathan smirked and shook his head. So, this was where Lonnie's mind went when his son goes missing, complaints about Hopper, bragging about the city, and claiming to care about his family.

"What, you think I don't want to see you?" Lonnie asked.

"I know you don't," stated Jonathan.

"See that's you mother talkin' right there," he said, annoyed. "She even know you're here?" Again, Jonathan didn't respond, and Lonnie scoffed. "Oh, great. So one kid goes missing, the other one runs wild. Some real fine parenting right there. Look, all I'm saying is, maybe I'm not the asshole, all right?"

Pulling Wills' missing poster out of his bag, Jonathan shoved it to Lonnie's chest and walked away, saying, "In case you forgot what he looks like."

Lonnie looked down into the smiling face of his youngest son and back up at the Mustang before him. Cynthia walked up just behind him. He could feel her body against his as she crowed into his ear, "He's kinda cute, hmm? Maybe I'll trade you in for the younger model?"

She smiled and chewed her gum as Lonnie turned to watch Jonathan storm off.

---

"Just doesn't make any sense, Chief," said Earl, a white-haired and bearded man wearing a fishing cap. Sitting on a bench in the sheriff's station he tried to ignite his lighter, a cigarette waiting in his mouth. His shaking hands failed him, and he looked away frustrated and anxious.



Leaning forward, Hopper holds out his lighter. Earl bends over it and Hopper lights the cigarette in his mouth with the flame, asking him, "You, uh, notice anything, odd about him the last few weeks?"

Hopper sat, straddling the back of a chair, facing Earl, with Callahan sitting on the edge of the desk.

"No, we fixin' to go fishing down the Etowah next Sunday," Earl said. "I mean, he was lookin' forward to it. I know it."

"He got any enemies you might know about? I mean, people who might not want him around?"

Earl shook his head, "The exes didn't like him much. That's for sure, but...nah."

"When was the last time you saw him?" Hopper asked.

"Yesterday. Lunch, same as always."

"Just you and the boys?"

"Yep. Me an' Henry and..." Earl sighed, growing emotional. "Well, there was this, uh, this kid. No kid did this."

"Kid?" Hopper's eyebrows raised in alarm. "What are you talking about?"

"Yeah. At lunch, uh, there was this boy that, uh...I mean, he was trying to steal food out of Benny's kitchen," Earl chuckled. "Can you imagine that?"

Hopper glanced at Callahan meaningfully who got up and stalked away.

"This kid," urged Hopper. "What'd he look like?"

Earl held his hand over four feet above the ground. "Well he was about yea high. You know, tiny like. I didn't get a good look at him, though. He was back in the kitchen."

Coming close, Callahan held out Will's missing poster, and asked, "He

look like this?"

Looking at it, Earl shook his head. "Oh, no, that's...that's Lonnie's missin' kid. No. This was a different kid." Hopper slumped a little at his words, disappointed, until, "This one had really short hair. I mean, it was buzzed nearly down to the scalp."

"Yeah, well, let's...you know, let's forget about the haircut," Hopper stood and took the hold of the poster, looking down at Will. "I mean if this kid had a buzz cut...could it be Lonnie's kid?"

"Well, I...I didn't get a good look at him," Earl reiterated, and paused. "About the right height though, I mean, could've been. Yeah, that's ...could've been."

Hopper nodded and sighed, wondering what the hell Will might have gotten into.

---

Nancy lay back on her bed twirling her hair around a finger and talking to Barb on the phone. "Becasue I don't want to go by myself... Barb...Barb it's not rocket science," she sat up. "You just tell your parents you're gonna stay at my place afterwards....no tell them we're studying."

"Nancy! Dinner!" Karen called to her daughter from downstairs.

Nancy held the phone away as she hollered back. "Coming! Look I gotta go. I'll see you in an hour." She smiled, then hung up.

Around the dinner table the Wheeler family ate their supper, joined by Dustin and Lucas. Karen glanced around at the boys who were very silent and did not seem very interested in eating meatloaf.

"Something wrong with the meatloaf?" she asked.

"Um, no, I had two bologna sandwiches for lunch," Dustin smiled. "I don't know why."

Lucas offered a smile as well, "Me, too."

Nancy grinned at her mother, and said sweetly. "It's delicious,

Mommy."

"Thank you, Sweetie," Karen replied, grateful.

Deciding now was the time, Nancy said, "So there's this...special assembly thing tonight...for Will at the school field. Barb's driving."

Suddenly, stern, Karen asked, "Why am I just hearing about this?"

Nancy raised eyebrows, "I thought you knew."

"I told you, i don't want you out after dark until Will is found."

"I know, I know," said Nancy. "But it'd be super weird if I'm not there. I mean, everyone's going."

Karen sighed, weary, "Just be back by ten. Why don't you take the boys, too?" she added, gesturing at the boys with her fork.

"No!" said Mike and Dustin, forcefully.

"Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm," Lucas disagreed, and they all shook their heads at the suggestion.

Surprised, Karen asked, "Don't you think you should be there? For Will?"

Behind Karen, Ted, and Nancy, who were all distracted by the boys, Mike noticed Eleven stroll past the living room peering around. He snorted milk out of his nose at the sight and Karen twisted around to gaze behind, but before she had Dustin slammed the table hard causing her to snap back around in shock. Holly groaned, disgruntled.

"Sorry. Spasm," he slumped back into his chair and smirked. Eleven walking out of sight behind Karen. Mike stared down into his lap at the milk there, and Lucas looked uncomfortably from Dustin to Mike.

Holly whimpered, and Karen reassured her, "Oh, it's okay Holly. It's just a loud noise."

"Nice," Nancy whispered at Dustin, sarcastically.

---

Outside of Benny's Burgers, volunteers searched the area for Will.

"Will!"

"Better come out buddy! Will! Where are ya?"

"Will!"

Noise was everywhere. People wearing orange vests with flashlights hollered Will's name, dogs barked, sirens wailed.

"Hey, you think Earl really saw Will?" Callahan asked Hopper. "I mean what's he doin' with a shaved head? And stealing food from Benny?"

Hopper leaned into his face, irked. "Tell you what, when we find him," he jabbed Callahan with his flashlight. "We'll ask."

"Can't ask a corpse questions," Powell stated, and Hopper looked back ready to retort when they heard a whistle sound off in the distance.

A woman shouted, "Hold up!"

His heart in his throat Hopper yelled, "You got something?"

He ran, following the whistling, hoping against hope that it wasn't a body.

"Hey, what do you got?" Hopper asked, scanning the area. He saw no dead kid.

Mr. Clarke answered, "Not sure. Maybe nothing."

He held out a scrap of white fabric with pale blue dots etched over it. It was a small bit of cloth, only about three or four inches long. Hopper noticed that the blue dots formed little diamonds, and he realized the scrap was from a hospital gown. With all their flashlights trained on the cloth, Mr. Clarke shined his down a large drainpipe. "I found this. In there."

Beams of light now focused on the drain, Powell said, "No way a kid

crawls through there."

"I don't know..."uttered Hopper, softly. "Scared enough one might. His brother said he was good at hiding."

Hopper led his officers on a quick search of the area. Coming to the road, Hopper recognized it as the same road they had found Will's bike along. They cross it to find a fence surrounding the property of Hawkins National Laboratory.

---

Eleven fiddled with Mikes' Supercomm, from which nothing but static could be heard.

Mike approached her in her hut. "El?"

She looked up at Mike as he came forward with a tray of food. Dustin and Lucas huddled behind him, too nervous to get any closer.

Mike set the tray before her, and said, "No adults. Just us and some meatloaf."

She peered at the food, at Mike, and then at his friends who gazed back with apprehension.

"Don't worry," He assured her. "They won't tell anyone about you. They promise. Right?"

"We never would've upset you if we knew you had superpowers," Dustin smiled at her, and Mike leaned back and punched him. ("Ow!" said Dustin.)

"What Dustin is trying to say is that they were just scared...earlier. That's all."

"We just wanted to find our friend," Lucas said, solemnly.

"Friend?" said Eleven, confused.

"Yeah, friend. Will?"

"What is friend?" asked Eleven.

"Is she serious?" Lucas asked Dustin, incredulously. Dustin shrugged so Lucas attempted to explain. "Um...a friend is-"

"Is someone you'd do anything for," Mike intervened.

"You lend them your cool stuff, like comic books and trading cards," piped in Dustin.

"...and they never break a promise," finished Mike.

Lucas added, "Especially when there's spit."

"Spit?" asked Eleven, confused again.

"A spit swear means," Lucas spat into his palm. "You never break your word," he grabbed Dustin's hand and shook it. "It's a bond."

Dustin stared down at his hand, disgusted.

"That's super important, because friends they tell each other things," Mike clarified as Dustin made an annoyed gesture at Lucas wiping his hand on his shirt. "Things that parents don't know."

Eleven thought about this, wondering what it would be like to have a friend. A friend to talk to. She gazed up at Mike.

---

Barb drove down a dark road, and Nancy said, "Barbara, pull over."

"What?"

"Pull over!" Nancy ordered.

Pulling over to the curb, Barb asked, "What are we doing here? His house is three blocks away."

"We can't park in the driveway," she said as if stating the obvious, then pulled down the sun visor to check her make-up in the mirror.

"Are you serious?" Barb scoffed.

"Yeah, the neighbors might see," she answered.

Barbara watched Nancy put on lipstick. "This is so stupid. I'm just gonna drop you off."

"Calm down, Barb. Come on. You promised that you'd go. You're coming," she smiled. "We're gonna have a great time."

"He just wants to get in your pants," Barb burst out.

Nancy giggled, "No he doesn't."

Appalled, Barb said, "Nance, seriously. He invited you to his house. His parents aren't home. Come on, you are not this stupid."

"Tommy H. and Carol are gonna be there," pointed out Nancy.

"Tommy and Carol have been having sex since, like, seventh grade. It'll probably just be, like, a big orgy," Barb reasoned.

"Gross."

"I'm serious!"

Nancy reached down and pulled off her sweater. "All right, well...You can be like my guardian. All right? Make sure I don't get drunk and don't do anything stupid."

Barbara turned away, miffed, before glancing over at Nancy, "Is that a new bra?"

With a most unconvincing look of innocence, Nancy answered, "No."

Trotting up to a large house, Nancy and Barbara could hear muffled music coming from inside. Nancy rang the doorbell once.

Barbara shivered.

"Barb, chill," Nancy said.

"I'm chill," Barb answered.

The music grew loud as the double doors swung open and with a slick smile Steve peered at Nancy to Barb and back to Nancy and said, "Hello, ladies."

---

Clothes strewn across the floor in a dark bedroom, Hopper lay awake in bed with a woman passed out beside him, her arm across his bare chest. With a grunt, he lifted himself out of bed and dressed into his jeans and a plaid, button-up shirt. Standing out on his patio, gazing at the night, he smoked a cigarette, a beer sitting beside him on the rail.

He thought of his four years as sheriff in Hawkins, and of the years of working as a cop for Indianapolis. The crime he ran into there. The bloodshed. Gang wars. Human trafficking. None of it had prepared him for this case. This case that involved people he knew. People he cared about. He had left the city because it all got to be too much. But somehow the job had hunted him down, and now a kid was missing, and a man was dead. Was it somehow connected?

"What are you doing? It's freezing," said Sandra, coming out onto the freezing deck to join him.

Turning he gazed down at her, and asked, "You ever feel cursed?" She didn't respond, not seeming to know what to say. "You know, the last person to go missing here was in, uh...the summer of '23. The last suicide was the fall of '61."

She appeared uncomfortable. She didn't know how to reassure him, and why should she? He had only called her to sleep with her.

Attempting to lighten the mood, she smiled and asked, "When'd the last person freeze to death?" Hopper smiled. "Hey, come back inside. Warm me up. Just..."

"Just give me a minute out here," said Hopper.

Sandra sighed and hurried back in. Shivering Hopper gazed at the darkness smoking his cigarette.

---

Eleven circled the basement floor before sitting at the table where Dungeons and Dragons sat untouched. The game pieces waiting in their previous places from the weekend campaign.



"What's the weirdo doing?" queried Lucas.

The boys loomed over Eleven, watching as she closed her eyes, her arms out in front of her, palms flat on the table.

"El?" asked Mike.

Opening her eyes, Eleven picked up the game piece that belonged to Will. She held it out and said, "Will."

Dustin looked simultaneously scared and awed. "Superpowers, " he said. Lucas glanced at him shaking his head in disgust.

Mike sat at the table next to her. "Did you see him? On Mirkwood? Do you know where he is?"

She flashed him a look then swept the game pieces from the board onto the floor with her arm. She then flipped the board upside down and placed Will's piece onto the black underside of the board. The boys stared, nonplussed.

"I don't understand," Mike admitted.

"Hiding," said Eleven.

"Will is hiding?" asked Mike.

She nodded. Lucas bent down, peering between Mike and El. Dustin looked scared.

"From the bad men?" Mike questioned, but Eleven shook her head. "Then from who?"

She placed the Demogorgon piece across from Will's, and Mike looked appalled at the other boys, Lucas stared aghast and glanced at Dustin who ran his hands over his head, setting his hat lopsided, and he exhaled in stress. For the first time, the three boys were truly afraid for their friend, Will.

---

White wooden barriers blocked the scene where the scrap of fabric had been found at the edge of the woods, the term 'police' written

across each one. A car approached the area, coming to a stop in front of them. After shutting off the car Jonathan hopped out. He unlocked the trunk and pulled out a camera. Ducking under striped, police tape stretched between the barriers Jonathan entered the woods.

Peering around the base of the trees, Jonathan began snapping photos of the area. He stared at the leaves around him, searching for a clue, for anything.

"Where are you?" he whispered.

Jonathan continued snapping photos until, quite suddenly, a woman's scream rent the night air. He spun around in shock, then ran toward the steady screaming.

The trees thinned and from a distance he saw the backyard of a large house, with a swimming pool full to the brim. Tommy H. held Carol around her waist and was threatening to throw her into the water.

She shrieked, again as Tommy shouted, "One! Two! Three!"

Jonathan huffed and rolled his eyes in annoyance.

"Stop it, Tommy, no! Don't!" Tommy laughed, but did not throw her in. "You're such an asshole, Tommy."

Music warbled in the background. Steve ambled around a table, seizing a can of beer. Using a penknife he punctured a hole in the bottom of a can and drank it down in one long chug. Nancy and Barbara watched, the former amused, but the latter rolled her eyes.

Steve sighed, and casually laid out on a lawn chair pulling the cigarette from behind his left ear.

Smiling, Nancy asked him, "Is that supposed to impress me?"

With the cigarette held loosely between his lips, Steve feigned a look of bewilderment and asked, "You're not?"

"You are a cliché, you do realize that?" Nancy flirted.

"You are a cliché," he retorted, as he lit his cigarette. "What with

your...your grades and your band practice..."

Nancy laughed, "I'm so not in band."

"Okay, party girl. Why don't you just, uh, show us how it's done then?" He held the penknife out to her.

"Okay," she said, confidently.

Barb shook her head in disgust, looking down at her lap. She was still wearing her coat.

In the distance, Jonathan watched the little group in silence wondering how it must feel to not have a care in the world.

Drinking a beer, Tommy and Carol watched as Nancy attempted to puncture her can.

"You gotta make a little hole right in-" Steve tried to assist her.

"I got it," Nancy cut across him.

'Yeah, she's smart, you douche!' Tommy shot at him as he crushed the empty beer can against his head, and tossed it onto the ground.

Successfully slicing open the beer, Nancy sucked the liquid into her mouth through the hole she had made.

"Chug, chug, chug," Steve chanted. Tommy and Carol joined in the chant which grew in pitch and erupted into cheers and whoops as Nancy finished and dropped the can with a flourish. Nancy performed a small curtsy. Barbara, however, did not join in the festivity.

Taking notice of her disgruntled friend, Nancy asked, "Barb, you wanna try?"

Got off guard and looking incredulous, Barb said, "What? No. No, I don't want to. Thanks."

Smiling, Nancy grabbed another can of beer, "Come on."

"Yeah. Come on, yeah," joined Steve.

"Nance, I don't want to," Barb said, a note of seriousness in her voice.

Nancy paused, but held the can out. "It's fun. Just give a-

"Nance."

"Just...just give it a shot," Nancy needed.

Looking annoyed, Barb took the can, hoping they'd lay off her if she did it once, "Okay."

Nancy glanced back and smiled at Steve, who smirked amused, as they watched Barb.

Barb struggled to cut open the can. The penknife slipped in her hand and she cut her thumb instead. Dropping the can she sucked at her wound hissing in pain as Tommy laughed. Barb examined her hand to see bright, red blood flowing from the laceration.

"Gnarly," grinned Tommy.

"Are you okay?" asked Nancy, concerned.

"Yeah," said Barb, shortly.

"Barb, you're bleeding," Nancy protested.

"I'm fine," She said forcefully, looking upset. Turning to Steve, she asked, "Where's your bathroom?"

Steve hopped up. "Oh it's, it's uh, down past the kitchen, to the left."

"Okay, thanks," she replied.

Jonathan remained where he was and he even snapped photos of the group. He wasn't sure why he was so interested in what they were doing. He'd never been that interested in social gatherings. But he was intrigued at the unlikeliness of the group, primarily Barb and Nancy.

He'd known that Nancy Wheeler was into Steve Harrington, but he

had never really known why. She was smart and kind, so it didn't make sense for her to like such a complete ass. Barb, on the other hand, clearly didn't want to be there. Anyone could see that. The dynamic made for good photography, and he looked forward to analyzing the photos after he had developed them, sure he would see more in each person's face, in their body language.

As he watched through the lens of his camera, Carol, who stood smiling smugly in front of the pool, was shoved into the water by Tommy who had snuck up behind her.

She screamed, and shouted, "Oh my God! What the hell Tommy?"

Tommy smirked, then threw his cigarette on the ground and jumped in after her.

"No!" she shrieked.

Nancy stood at the edge of the pool, laughing, when Steve pushed her into the water without warning. She gasped and screamed, and Steve jumped in as well.

Their laughter carried through the chilly, night air.

---

Joyce slouched alone in her littered house, asleep in the flowery chair, the phone on her lap. The phone rang and she snapped awake, hurrying to answer.

"Hello?" Nothing but static answered. "Hello? Who is this?" Again, she heard that muffled breathing that so reminded her of Will.

"Will?" Strange issued over the phone and she couldn't make sense of them. Crying, she said, "Will, it's me. Talk to me. I'm here. Jus-just tell me where you are, Honey. I can hear you. Please."

The static grew louder, and then, sounding slightly distorted, she distinctly heard Will say, "Mom?"

Lights flickered all throughout the house, and went unnoticed as Joyce gasped.

"Will!" she sobbed, hysterically. "Yes, it's me. It's me. Where are you? Where are you? Just talk to me-"

Electricity spiked through the phone once again, and Joyce screamed as she received a painful shock, flinging the phone to the floor in instinct.

Immediately stooping to retrieve the phone, she screamed, "Oh no no! No! No! Oh no!" She tried to get the phone working, but it too, was dead and charred, as the previous one had been. "No no no no! Oh no!" She chanted through her sobs.

Throwing the phone from her, she screamed at the top of her lungs, "No!" and fell to the floor wracked in grief. Pounding the floor she yelled, "No! No!"

Slamming the floor again she suddenly noticed that the lights were flickering wildly and she grew silent. Stumbling to her feet she tottered through the house.

"Jonathan?" she asked, the empty home. Lights in the hall flickered as she neared it, and she huddled against the wall opposite the fixtures, frightened and bewildered. "What?"

Suddenly, a small lamp flickered on a stand at the end of the hall. Joyce whimpered fearfully, wondering if Hopper might have been right, and she wasn't in her right mind, when abruptly music began blaring from within Will's bedroom.

*Should I stay or should I go?*

Joyce let out breathy scream, and she could see lights dancing through the gap from under the door. Taking deep breaths of air, she gathered her courage and entered the room staring at stereo. Light flared from the lamp on Will's dresser to her left. The light grew brighter and brighter, became almost blinding.

"Will, is that you?" she asked, tremulously.

All at once the light shut off and the music ceased. Moaning in confusion Joyce stared out the window of her son's room. Then, she heard something to her left and glancing over she witnessed the wall

stretching before her eyes. Bulging out as if made of flexible plastic or rubber. Screaming in horror, she bolted from the houses, running to her car.

"Oh my god!" she wailed.

Retrieving the keys from the sun visor, she fumbled in trying to get the car to start, "Oh, God! Oh my God!"

The engine finally started and just as she was about to throw the gear into drive, the music from her son's room resumed, and electricity crackled throughout the house, as the lights danced and flickered.

"Will," she whispered.

Turning the car off, she glared at the house. A hot rod of fury stole through her, as she thought of Will. Whatever that thing was, it took her boy. She knew it. Getting out of the car, she slowly returned to the house.

---

Wrapped in towels Nancy, Carol, Tommy, and Steve all shivered trying to warm themselves.

"I'm freezing," Carol whined. They stood in the foyer of Steve's house.

"Hmm...well, I hear his mom's room has a fireplace," Tommy stated, suggestively. He headed upstairs to the rooms beyond.

Steve held out his arms, "Are you kidding?"

"Oh yeah?" said Carol, following Tommy.

"Okay, well, you know, you are cleaning the sheets," he told their retreating backs. Reaching out to Nancy, he asked, "You all right?"

"Yeah," she answered.

"Yeah? Come on let's get you some dry clothes," He trotted off upstairs, and Nancy, wrapping her blanket more closely around her, followed.

"Nance. Nancy!" She turned to see Barbara at the bottom of the staircase, looking upset. "Where are you going?"

"Nowhere. Just...upstairs. To change. I..."She gestured at her wet clothes and giggled as she said, "...fell in the pool."

Barb stared, disbelieving, and Nancy's smile slipped before she added, "Why don't you go ahead and go home. I'll just...I'll get a ride or something."

"Nance..." Barb protested at the absurdity of her friend.

"Barb...I'm fine," she smiled, a little too widely, feeling like she was on the verge of bursting out into giddy laughter, or tears. She wasn't sure which, or why.

"This isn't you," Barb said, sadly.

"I'm fine. Just...go ahead and go home, okay?" She turned leaving Barb alone downstairs as she continued on to Steve's room.

Barbara glanced down at her feet and scoffed in disbelief.

Out in the woods, Jonathan who noticed movements in one of the bedroom windows peered through the lens. Seeing Nancy, he noticed a different expression on her face than he had seen all night from her. He snapped another photo, thinking it'd be a good one to analyze as well. To breakdown the play of emotion.

From inside Steve tapped Nancy's shoulder, and handed her some dry clothes, which she takes gratefully.

"Thanks."

Steve smiled down at her. She inhaled, and asked with a small smile "Um...some privacy, maybe?"

"Oh," Steve smiled and nodded. "Yeah, right, sorry..." And, he turned away, pacing from her.

Setting her clothes on the bed, she paused before, looking at Steve's back, she said softly, "Steve?"



Steve turned, and with his eyes trained on her, she removed her shirt. Holding it in her hands, she gazed at him with uncertainty. Steve appeared awed and surprised. "Damn."

She smiled, blushing, "Shut up."

Walking over to her he stooped and kissed her.

Hidden by the trees Jonathan had stopped watching, feeling unhappy and somehow, disappointed, looking back up he peered through his lens and spotted Barbara, sitting alone on the diving board, wading her bare feet in the water. He took several photos of her but soon ran out of film. He crouched over his camera to change it out.

Feeling the icy water pass between her toes, Barbara sat quietly on the diving board a thin fog all around her. She thought about Nancy, and emotion welled up in her as she thought her best friend might have outgrown her. A throbbing pain shot through her thumb and she held her hand before her, noticing that the cut was bleeding through the bandage she had wrapped around it. A trickle of blood fell into the water below. The droplet dissipated like red smoke in the water. As Barbara examined her bleeding thumb, the lights flickered around her before blinking out. She heard a strange growling from behind her and she turned quickly.

From the woods, Jonathan heard a distant roar and what mind have been a shriek. However, peering through the bushes he couldn't see anyone. Thinking he must be hearing things he sighted and left his spot.

In Steve's room, he and nancy kissed passionately, wrapped around one another. Steve led Nancy to his bed and they sat upon it.

Outside the lights around the pool flashed back on, the diving board sat deserted. Barbara Holland gone.

## 4. Chapter 3 - Holly, Jolly

### Chapter 3 - Holly, Jolly

With a choking gasp Barb coughed out pool water tasting bile in the back of her throat as she did. Her nose ached, and she was freezing, and as she looked above her the world was foggy and something smeared across the lens of her glasses obstructed her vision. She was also soaking wet. Quickly, she pulled the glasses from her face and began to sit up, looking at the place around her, panic filling her to the brim.

She didn't recognize a single thing. Never in her life had she been in such a place. Strange black vines seemed to grow up all around her, but they were dead and decayed in appearance. How did she get here? She had just been...then the thought came that creature came to mind and as soon as it did she heard growling close by. Turning with a snap, she witnessed before her a creature unlike any she'd known. Tall, skinny, almost humanoid, clawed hands and no face. Screaming in horror, Barb turned and ran for her life.

Whimpering, Barb struggled to find a way out of what seemed to be a pit full of dead and slimy vines.

"Oh my God!" she screamed, as the creature circled closer to her, growling. Trying to climb the vines to escape the creature Barb called out in desperation, "Nancy!"

---

Falling back against pillows in a warm room, Nancy felt the weight of Steve against her as he kissed her with passion, their bodies moving together and their hands clinging to one another. Yanking his shirt off, Steve hovered over Nancy, skin on skin.

Outside of the Harrington's home, the swimming pool sat full, still, and serene. A distant cry echoed from nowhere in particular, almost as if from a memory or a dream. Nancy pulled away from Steve's lips, distracted. She had felt rather than heard the echo. What was that?

"Hey, what's the matter?" Steve asked her.

"Nothing," she said with a smile, and she pulled him to her again.

---

Still trying to climb her way up the vines, the growling closing in on her, Barb's hands found the rungs of a ladder latched to the wall of the pit. Immediately, she pulled herself up, but looking behind her she moaned in terror at the creature so near to her. With shaking arms, Barb pulled herself up onto the ground above the pit, lying flat on her stomach. Looking up she saw before her a large house, and lawn chairs. With a jolt, she realized she was looking at Steve Harrington's house, and that the pit she had climbed from was the swimming pool. But the world around her was dark and dead, with strange flurries floating everywhere, and the dead vines growing over everything. It was as if the world itself had died, and in confusion and fear she screamed out into the stifling air. In utter terror, Barb shrieked as she felt herself being dragged back into the pool by the creature. Before it could pull her all the way in however, she grabbed onto the rails of the pool ladder, and she clung to the cold metal with every ounce of strength in her body. Barb's screams mixed with the loud growling from the creature, and pain shot through her legs and up through her chest, like her very body was being ripped apart.

With a bloodcurdling scream, Barb bellowed, "Nancy!" before she was pulled from the ladder, back into the pool. Her screams were silenced, and the dead world held nothing but the sounds of the creature's low growling.

---

Nancy was lost in the heat of Steve, his lips moving over hers relentlessly. His hands gripping her, she holding tight to him. Nancy moaned in pleasure as Steve made love to her. Her body felt like she was on fire. She had never felt so good, so alive. Steve clasped Nancy's hand.

"You are so beautiful," he told her between kisses, and Nancy allowed herself to fall into an oblivion of pleasure and ecstasy.

In the early morning hours, Nancy sat on the edge of Steve's bed watching him sleep. She felt tired and uncertain. Flashes of the night spent with Steve passed through her head and Nancy wasn't sure how she felt about them. Hoping that it wasn't regret, she pulled Steve's

sweatshirt over herself, throwing the hood back from her damp hair. She looked back down at Steve.

"Steve," she placed her hand gently on his back and gave a small shake. "Hey, Steve."

"Mmm," came the muffled groan.

"I'll...see you tomorrow, okay?" she said.

"Mmm-hmm," Steve shifted in his sleep.

Feeling somehow alone and doubtful, Nancy turned away and left his room. She exited the house through the backyard not wanting anyone to see her. She slid the door shut and walked past the quiet swimming pool, steam rising from the water. As she passed, she heard rustling in the leaves to her right and she peered over at the trees, spooked as the hooting of an owl sounded in the distance. But deciding it was some animal she left the yard.

At home Nancy came in through the front door as quietly as possible, but a light in the hall came on and she jumped as her mother stepped forward to confront her in the foyer.

"Oh, Jesus you scared me," Nancy muttered.

"Oh, I scared you?" Karen's tone was full of anger.

Nancy looked down at the floor, "I know, I should have called."

"Where have you been?" Karen asked, loudly. She spared a quick glance up the stairs and whispered angrily, "We agreed on ten."

"After the assembly, some people wanted to get something to eat. I didn't think it'd be a big deal," she lied randomly.

"You didn't think to call and let me know?" Karen asked, emotionally. "With everything that's been going on?"

"I didn't realize how late it was, okay? I'm sorry Mom, what more do you want?" Nancy responded. She felt frustrated at her mother, always treating her like a little girl. She made to head upstairs but

her mother halted her progress as she took notice of what Nancy was wearing.

"Hey, wait. Whose sweatshirt is that?"

Nancy's eyes flickered nervously to her mother and away.

"Steve's," she answered reluctantly.

There was a little too much knowing in Karen's eyes as she said, "Steve's. So is Steve your boyfriend now?"

"What?" Nancy turned defensive before she could stop herself. "No! It was just cold, so I borrowed his sweatshirt. It's not a big deal."

"Nancy?" Karen sounded worried now. But Nancy had grown tired of her mother always poking her nose into her affairs.

"What?" she asked annoyed.

"You can talk to me," Karen replied. Looking straight into her daughter's eyes she almost pleaded, "You can talk to me. Whatever happened."

"Nothing happened," Nancy said quickly.

Karen didn't believe her. "Nancy."

"Nothing happened," Nancy repeated slower this time. She suddenly felt as if she might cry and, wanting nothing more than to escape, she said, "Can I please go?"

She didn't wait for an answer, but turned and left as Karen watched her, sad and disappointed.

---

Hanging from a tree in front of the Byers' home a swing bench creaked in the morning wind. Jonathan lay asleep in bed but woke as soft pleading met his ears. He could hear his mother's voice from another room.

"Will? Will? Sweetheart, can you hear me? Will...please...Will..."

Jonathan stumbled from bed, snatching up his t-shirt, and followed his mother's pleas into Will's room.

"Will...talk to me...it's me. Just talk to me. Talk to me. Just say..."

Finding her on Will's bed, Joyce rocked back and forth staring at the many lamps which she had arranged around the bed in a semicircle.

"Mom?" asked Jonathan confused.

"Jonathan! Come here. Come here," she said excitedly.

"Mom, what is this?" he hesitated feeling immensely worried.

"Come here, come here," she patted the bed beside her and taking his hand she looked back at the lamps around her.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"It's Will. It's Will. He's - he's trying to talk to me," her breath came out trembling, and tear tracks ran down her cheeks. She looked as if she hadn't slept all night, and she stared wide-eyed at the bulbs in the lamps, apparently waiting for something.

Jonathan tried to make sense of what she was saying, "He's trying to talk to you?"

"Yes, through...through the lights."

With dread, Jonathan realized the stress had gotten to her. "Mom!"

But Joyce interrupted his protest. "I know. I know. Just - just watch."

She turned back to the lamps and began speaking to them tenderly, "Will...your brother's here. Can you show him what you showed me, baby? Please."

One of the bulbs flickered before her and she gasped, pointing at it. "Did you see that?"

"It's the electricity, Mom!" Jonathan tried to pull her back over the edge she had clearly lost. "I-i-it's acting up. It's the same thing that

fried the phone."

"No! It is not the electricity, Jonathan. Something is going on here!" she pointed at the wall that had bulged out the night before. "Yesterday, the wall-"

"What?" Jonathan yelled. "What about the wall?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

"Mom, first the lights, then the wall?"

"I - I just know that Will is here," she said not knowing how she could possibly explain the events of the previous night, but knowing she needed him to believe her.

"No, Mom," said Jonathan.

Joyce stood, trying to think of how she could make it obvious that it was Will and not some fluke with the electricity. "Maybe if I get more lamps..."

But Jonathan stood too and he held her face between his hands, crying, "No, Mom. You don't need more lamps. You need to stop this, okay?" Moving his hands to her arms he said, "He is just lost! People are looking for him, and they're going to find him!"

Joyce looked into his eyes and knew there was no way to explain it to him. "Okay."

"This isn't helping," he continued.

"Okay, okay. Okay, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"Can you do me a favor, Mom?" He looked straight into her eyes. "Can you just try and get some sleep?"

Nodding, she said, "Yeah."

"Huh? Can you do that for me?"

"I promise, I will," she said.

"Yeah? Yeah."

"I just need to sit here for a minute," she told him, and he nodded.

"All right, I'll go make breakfast," he replied.

"Okay."

"Yeah," he said again and he turned and left his mother among the lamps.

Watching him leave, Joyce waited till he was sure to be out of earshot and she turned back to the lights, whispering, "Will?"

---

Back in the Wheelers' basement, Eleven sat on the sofa, fiddling again with Mike's *Supercomm*, although nothing but static could be heard. Mike, Dustin, and Lucas all huddled around the table and Mike instructed the others.

"We just tell our parents we have AV club after school. That'd give us at least a few hours for Operation Mirkwood."

"You seriously think that the weirdo knows where Will is?" asked Lucas, skeptical.

"Just trust me on this, okay?" said Mike.

"Okay," replied Lucas, unconvinced.

"Did you get the supplies?" Mike asked him.

"Yeah," Lucas turned and began pulling supplies out of his bag. "Binoculars...from 'Nam." He laid the item atop the Dungeons and Dragons game board that still lay upside down on the table, Will's game piece and the Demogorgon still facing each other.

"Army knife...also from 'Nam," he continued. "Hammer, camouflage bandana...and..." he pulled out a slingshot, announcing excitedly, "the wrist rocket."

"You're going to take out the Demogorgon with a slingshot?" asked



Dustin incredulously.

"First of all, it's a wrist rocket," Lucas corrected. "And second of all, the Demogorgon's not real. It's made up. But if there is something out there, I'm gonna shoot it in the eye..." he drew back the cord of the wrist rocket and released it with a snap. Mike and Dustin flinched and he finished enthusiastically, "...and blind it."

Turning to Dustin, Mike asked, "Dustin, what did you get?"

Dustin pulled out a backpack and flipped it upside down over the gameboard emptying the contents, all of which included food. "Well, alrighty." (Lucas stared from the food to Dustin with a blank expression.) "So, we've got..*Nutty Bars, Bazooka, Pez, Smarties, Pringles, Nilla Wafers*, apple," (Mike shared an annoyed glance with Lucas.) "...banana, and trail mix."

Dustin looked up at the others, pleased with himself.

"Seriously?" Lucas asked, sarcastically.

"We need energy for our travels. For stamina," Dustin said defensively. "And besides, why do we even need weapons anyway? We have her."

He pointed over at Eleven fiddling with the radio on the couch. She stared from Dustin to Lucas.

"She shut one door!" Lucas retorted.

"With her mind! Are you kidding me? That's insane! Imagine all the other cool stuff she could do. Like..." he hurried over to a side table against the wall and pulled out Mike's model of the *Millenium Falcon*. "I bet...that she could make this fly!"

Dustin stood in front of Eleven, holding the model out before him. "Hey! Hey!"

She peered up at him, expressionless. "Okay concentrate. Okay?" He dropped the model, which clattered on the floor. "Okay, one more time."

She watched as he bent to retrieve the model and Lucas sighed dramatically, shaking his head. Dustin held the model up again. "Use your powers, okay?" And again, he dropped the *Falcon*, but she merely stared at him, not even bothering to watch the starship's journey to the floor.

"Idiot," Lucas muttered.

Running over Mike snatched his starship from the floor, saying angrily, "She's not a dog!"

From above their heads they heard Karen call, "Boys! Time for school!"

Scattering to grab their things, Dustin and Lucas headed upstairs while Mike knelt before Eleven. "Stay down here. Don't make any noise, and don't leave. If you get hungry, eat Dustin's snacks, okay?"

"Michael!" Karen called.

"Coming!" he bellowed at the ceiling. Then turning back to Eleven he said, "You know those power lines?"

"Power lines?"

"Yeah. The ones behind my house?"

Eleven nodded, "Yes."

"Meet us there, after school."

"After school?"

"Yeah, three fifteen," he explained.

She stared blankly at him, and Mike could tell she didn't understand.

"Ah." He quickly removed his watch from his wrist and secured it around her wrist instead. "When the numbers read three-one-five, meet us there."

"Three-one-five," she repeated.

"Three-one-five," he confirmed.

She smiled and he scrambled off as she watched him go.

---

Nancy strolled alone through the halls of her high school, books clutched to her chest as students walked past. Was it just her or was everyone staring at her, like they knew she was different, guilty? She opened up her locker, firmly telling herself that she was just being paranoid, but she still hid behind the door of her locker trying to block herself from the rest of the hall as she retrieved her books. Steve however, appeared beside her and forced the door back against the neighboring lockers with a loud bang.

"Hey!" he said.

"Hey!" she answered nervously.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yeah! Yeah totally. I just," she looked around at the other students. "I feel like everyone's...staring at me."

Steve too, glanced around before turning hurriedly to her, "Oh I didn't ... I didn't tell anyone."

"I know. I know. Of course not," she hesitated, and picked at her sweater. "But what about, like, Tommy, and Carol and them?"

"You're being paranoid," he told her.

Nancy looked up at him and smiled. She couldn't help it, he somehow always knew how to make her smile. "I'm sorry."

"No. No, it's cute," he said.

Smiling again she glanced up at him, feeling somehow nervous.

"Hey... I had a good time," he said earnestly.

"Yeah, yeah. Me too," she answered, and she was surprised that she meant it, even if it was accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and a

little regret.

Leaning down he kissed her.

"Mmm. Hmm," he murmured with a giddy look in his eyes, and a grin spread across her face yet again as she watched him saunter off.

In her first period class Nancy took her usual seat by the window as the final bell rang. The empty desk beside her jarred her from thoughts about Steve and the night before. Leaning forward to address the girl sitting in front of her, she asked, "Hey, Ally. Where's Barb?"

"Um, shouldn't you know?" was her response and she tried to face the front again, but Nancy persisted.

"You haven't seen her anywhere...at all?" Ally shook her head, and Nancy sat back, gazing at Barb's desk wondering why she wasn't there.

---

Pulling up the road to Hawkins Lab in Hopper's truck, Powell, sitting passenger side of the driver, said, "There she is. Emerald city."

From the backseat, Callahan said, "I heard they make space weapons in there."

Powell frowned, "Space weapons?"

"Yeah. You know, like, Reagan's star wars. I guess we're going to blow the Ruskies to smithereens," he answered.

They pulled up to the gated entrance where they were met by an Army military police officer, who stepped out from his security box.

"Hey, can I help you?" the man asked.

"Uh, yeah. We're here for a tour," said Hopper.

The MP shook his head, "Oh, we don't give tours."

"Okay...a quick look around," Hopper suggested.

"You have to get clearance for that. You can contact, uh...Rick Schaeffer at the Department of Energy."

Hopper thought for a second before saying, "Maybe you seen it on TV. We got a local kid that's missing. We have reason to believe he might have snuck in here."

"Like I said, you have to speak to Mr. Schaeffer," the MP said, immovable.

Hopper cut his engine and placed his sheriff's hat on the dashboard of the truck, "What's your name?"

"Patrick," the MP responded.

"Patrick, I got a panicked mayor, and I got reporters breathing down my neck and I got a very upset mother," he looked at Patrick. "Now, I know the kid's not in there, but I gotta check off this box. Patrick, would you do me a favor? Would you speak to your boss and see what you can swing for us? I'd really appreciate it."

Patrick hesitated and Hopper added, "I'm talking ten minutes tops."

Patrick looked at the building he guarded, unsure, then to Hopper, and he nodded.

---

Dustin's snacks lay across the basement table most of its wrappers lying empty. Eleven sat cross-legged on the floor with Mike's *Millenium Falcon* hovering just above eye level. Eleven stared at it, focused, but then she looked away and the starship clattered to the floor. Reaching behind her she grabbed the radio from the sofa, and turned it on. But upon hearing the static she switched it back off and dropped it, bored.

Looking around the basement, Eleven's eyes fell on the stairs and with a mischievous look she got to her feet and snuck, barefoot, up to the first landing. Moments later, the footrest to the La-Z-Boy popped out and she rocked the chair back and forth staring around at the living room. She picked up the phone on the small table next to her chair. She could hear something coming from it and she held it to her

ear, and she registered a low humming sound. She pressed her lips together and hummed in the back of her throat to mimic the sound. Putting the phone back down, Eleven next crossed the room to the TV, and ran a finger down the edge of it before flipping the switch to turn it on.

A man was speaking from the television. "...was occupying a large part of Lebanon. Today, Syria has become a home for-

Pressing a thick button, she changed the channel, and a colorful, moving image appeared on the screen. Not like real life, but more like a colored drawing made to move and talk like people did in real life. She knew it must be for children. In the moving drawing, a blond and muscular man held up a sword, yelling, "I have the power!"

She changed the channel again, "...gift that will last forever. From the *Harmony's Treasures'* collection-

The channel flipped again and music played. Again the channel changed and a song was playing along with another colorful drawing made alive.

*On the beach and in the sun*

An image of a can of coca cola rolling across a sandy beach appeared as the song played.

*The real thing is so much fun*

Eleven felt her breathing grow heavy and fast.

*All the times of your life and the things that you do*

She closed her eyes as the drawing of the can forced a memory to the surface of her thoughts.

*Coke is right there with you*

---

*In a starch, white room, Eleven sat before a table in a cold metal chair with electrodes attached to her head like a perverse crown. The table was*

*empty other than a red and white aluminum can with the words "Coca cola" on it's side.*

*Across from her was a window in the wall, behind from which stood Papa and the other scientists watching among the sound of humming devices and beeping machines. A camera stood in the room with her, sitting on a tripod, its lens trained on her. Papa handed one of the scientists a clipboard as he stared at Eleven. She gazed back at him, then looked back at the can as he had instructed her to do. She focused, and as nothing happened she strained her mind forcing herself to concentrate on nothing but the can.*

*In the control room a machine printed out a long coil of paper, as a needle copied black lines across its surface. The lines came in waves as they printed the results of Eleven's brain activity, transmitted through the electrodes attached to her scalp. The wavelengths were erratic with activity, and the devices beeped rapidly.*

*In the lab room, Eleven focused hard on the can, until it crumbled in on itself. Her breathing came in deep pants, and she looked up at Papa through the window. He stood smiling at her, pleased with her performance. Suddenly, she felt a trickle from her left nostril and she touched the wet stream coming from her nose, and looking at her fingers saw that it was blood. Feeling exhausted and worried, she gazed again at Papa, who only continued to smile.*

---

Opening her eyes the jingle finished playing with the line

*Coke is it!*

Eleven switched the television back off, breathing hard. She stood up and walked away from the living room.

---

Joyce dragged a box across the floor filled with Christmas decorations. From its depths she pulled a tangled wad of Christmas lights. Standing on a chair she hammered a nail into the wall, stepped down, scooted the chair about a foot over, then stepped up and hammered in another nail. She continued this all around her house, as her dog sat watching, sometimes whimpering from the

noise. She shoved furniture aside, removed picture frames and she hung the lights from the nails. Eventually she tried to stretch the lights across the room so that they would hang below the ceiling, but she had run out of the strings of lights as they could not reach the opposite wall. She looked around disappointed and frustrated.

Half an hour later, she was piling boxes of Christmas lights onto the counter of the general store. She could feel the bewildered Donald watching her as a Christmas carol played softly over the PA system.

Sympathizing, but confused, Donald started, "Joyce..."

But, Joyce, tired of trying to explain herself, said, "Just ring me up Donald."

---

"And you think this missing boy may have crawled through here?"

Hopper shone a flashlight down the drainpipe he, Powell, Callahan, and one of the employees of Hawkins Lab were standing around. Hopper knew it was the opposite end to the drainpipe where they had found the scrap of hospital gown. Powell and the suited government man stood behind him as he crouched low staring down the pipe. Powell leaned over to see inside.

"Well, that was the idea," Hopper replied. Hawkins Laboratory stood imposing behind them. They had yet to be taken inside.

"Yeah, I just don't see how that'd be possible," said the man. "We've got over a hundred cameras. Every square inch covered, plus all my guys. No one breaks in here. Certainly not some kid."

Hopper, glanced above their heads at a security camera. "Those cameras, you keep the tapes?"

Inside Hawkins Lab, the government employee led Hopper, Powell, and Callahan through a set of double doors. Hopper followed along looking around as he did. They passed by several scientists going about their work and, most bizarre of all, they passed a section of corridor blocked off by a large hazmat tarp. Two armed soldiers guarded the entrance.



"If you don't mind me asking, what do you guys do in here?" asked Hopper.

The man guiding them, chuckled. "You're asking the wrong guy."

"Staying one step ahead of the Russians?" Hopper asked anyways.

"I expect. Something like that," the man replied.

"Who's in charge here?"

"That'd be Dr. Brenner." But Hopper didn't recognize the name.

They rounded a corner and Callahan asked, "And he builds the space lasers?"

The man frowned, confused. "Space lasers?"

"Ignore him," stated Hopper.

On a television screen in a dim security room, Hopper, Powell, and Callahan viewed a garbled black and white security video. A couple of AV technicians sat before them rewinding the videos to specified times at their request.

Frowning, Hopper asked, "This is the night of the sixth and seventh we're seeing here?"

Their guide nodded, "That's correct."

Hopper stared at the image, which displayed the drainpipe and zero activity around it. The tape ended and Hopper raised his eyes. Looking at the guide and back to the technicians, he asked, "Is that it?"

The man smirked, "Like I said, we would have seen him."

As they strolled back to Hopper's truck, their guide having left them at the building's entrance, Hopper asked Powell and Callahan. "Night of the seventh we had a search party out for Will. You remember anything about that night?"

"Mmm, not much to remember. Called it off," replied Callahan.

"Cause of the storm," said Powell, with dawning realization.

"Yeah, a lot of rain that night," said Hopper. "You see any rain on that tape?"

Callahan and Powell walked around to the other side of the truck as Hopper paused by the driver's door and he turned to stare back at the building.

"What are you thinking?" asked Powell.

"I don't know," Hopper turned back to look at Powell. "But they're lying."

Hopper and his officers drove away. Near the spot in which they had been parked stood a large vent. The vent lead to a large fan, larger than a grown man, its blades rotating in an underground lab where strange flurries floated all around, and men in white hazmat suits worked at gathering samples from the vine-infested area. Other workers moved in equipment, as Dr. Brenner stood in his hazmat suit, watching their progress, and staring at the strange fissure in the wall as it glowed from within and growled. A large piece of equipment was lowered carefully to the ground by crane before his feet, and the workers quickly drilled it to the floor with large bolts.

---

Still barefoot, Eleven slowly traveled up to the second landing of Mike's house to the room she was most interested in. Nancy's room was neat and pretty like the girl in the photo had been. A box sat on the dresser and, curious to know what was inside, Eleven opened it. Music began to play and she quickly closed it, startled. There was no one but her to hear however, so taking a deep breath she opened it again and allowed the music to play. A small figure of a girl, no bigger than her middle finger, twirled around on the tips of her toes as the music played. It was a sweet melody yet for some reason Eleven felt as if she might cry. Looking to her right she noticed several photos on the wall. Walking over to peer at them she saw that most featured Nancy. Many showed her as a young laughing girl, happy and loved, wearing pretty dresses with long hair, her arms

around friends. And with sadness, Eleven wondered why she did not have photos of her doing the same things. Why did she not have a past filled with bright and beautiful memories?

---

Nancy made her way through the cafeteria, searching through the sea of faces for Barb, growing increasingly worried.

"That's why science doesn't make any damn sense to me, " she heard Tommy saying from a table nearby.

"No, I swear," Carol was saying. "Look at this. It's totally frostbite."

Nancy joined them, sitting next to Steve, who was handing Tommy his applesauce, while Carol complained about the rash on her ankle which she had propped up on the table in front of her.

"Oh thanks, man," Tommy said to Steve, then he answered Carol. "It's a heated pool."

"Well, if it's not frostbite, then what is it?" griped Carol.

"Ugh, I don't care what it is, it's disgusting!" Steve complained. "Get it off the table. We're eating here."

Tommy attempted to poke the rash with his spoon, but Carol slapped his hand away.

"Ew!" she whined. Tommy chuckled.

Nancy watched the pair for a moment, then asked, "Hey, Tommy? When you left, did you see Barb?"

"What?" he asked.

"Barbara. She's not here today."

"I seriously have no idea who you're talking about," he snorted with laughter, and Carol laughed, too.

Annoyed with the pair, Steve said, "Come on, don't be an ass, man. Did ya - did you see her leave last night or not?"

Tommy settled down, with a glance at Steve, "No. She was gone when we left."

"Probably couldn't stand listening to all that moaning," quipped Carol, and Tommy chuckled as Carol began moaning softly, but she grew louder as Tommy began rocking in his seat and grunting. "Oh, Steve. Oh Steve, oh Steve, oh Steve!"

She finished loudly as Tommy banged on the table. People stared at them from around the cafeteria, and Nancy looked down into her lap, humiliated. Steve smiled, amused, as Tommy and Carol erupted into laughter again.

Addressing Nancy, Steve said, "Listen...I'm sure she's fine. She's probably just, she's probably just, like, skipping or something."

He nodded assuringly, but Nancy was not convinced. She knew Barb too well to believe that. She muttered. "Yeah. Yeah probably."

Looking past Steve, Nancy spotted Jonathan at the other end of the cafeteria gazing at her. She found herself hoping he hadn't heard Tommy and Carol a moment ago.

---

During recess, Mike, Lucas, and Dustin searched the ground for stones to use with the wrist rocket.

"How about this one?" asked Mike, holding a stone out to Dustin who took the rock and examined it.

"Too big for the sling," he pronounced, and they continued scouring the ground. As they combed the grass Dustin said conversationally, "So, do think Eleven was born with her powers, like the X-men or do you think she acquired them like...like Green Lantern?"

Lucas frowned, "She's not a superhero. She's a weirdo."

Distracted from his search, Mike asked, "Why does that matter? The X-men are weirdos."

"If you love her so much, why don't you marry her?" Lucas shot.

Beginning to feel angry and defensive, Mike said, "What are you talking about?"

"Mike, seriously?"

"What?"

"You look at her all like," Lucas placed his hands over his heart, and he began shuffling toward him with baby steps saying in a sweet, mocking voice, "Hi El! El! El! El, I love you so much!" He threw himself onto Mike in a hug, then got down on one knee holding Mike's arm, "Would you marry me?"

Snatching his arm away, his cheeks burning, Mike said, "Shut up, Lucas."

"Yeah, shut up, Lucas," said Troy as he and James approached them. "What are you losers doing back here?"

"Probably looking for their missing friend," laughed James.

Dustin's head snapped up and he said seriously, "That's not funny. It's serious. He's in danger."

"I hate to break it to you, Toothless, but he's not in danger. He's dead," Troy said cruelly. "That's what my dad says."

Lucas exhaled angrily.

"He said he was probably killed by some other queer," Troy continued. He and James laughed again.

"Come on. Just ignore them," Mike told his irate friends, and he turned to walk away but Troy stuck out his foot and tripped Mike, who fell and bust his chin hard on a stone in the grass. Mike groaned in pain.

"Watch where you're going, Frogface," snickered Troy, and James high-fived him.

Dustin and Lucas helped Mike back to his feet as the bullies stalked off.

"You all right?" Lucas asked kindly.

"Yeah," Mike nodded, embarrassed.

Dustin sighed then looked down at the ground. He picked up a stone and held it out for his dejected friend to examine. "Hey. How about this one?"

Mike took the stone, and Dustin patted his shoulder. He smiled, nodding, "Yeah."

Dustin smiled back, "Yeah."

"Yeah, this is it," Mike said again, cheering up.

Lucas grinned widely, nodding his head, and he took hold of the stone saying, "Oh yeah. Yeah, this is the monster killer!"

Mike laughed as Lucas exclaimed in excitement. "Whoo!"

---

Jonathan slid a blank sheet of white photo paper into a tray of solution, a warm red light shining down in the dark room. Jonathan stared down at the sheet as the image formed before his eyes. The pictures he'd already developed hung clipped to a string, drying, and they showed the partying friends of the night before, teenagers goofing off and in the process of undressing. He hung up the one he just developed and it showed Nancy staring thoughtfully out of Steve's bedroom window. At that moment a fellow student walked in and she smiled at him.

"Hey," she said.

Surprised and caught off guard, Jonathan answered. "Oh, hey!"

He hurriedly pulled the images down from the line, but it was too late as with a fading grin she noticed the pictures. He left quickly, the girl staring after him, and when Jonathan disappeared she looked back at the empty line, the clips swinging wildly.

---

The buzzing of electricity filled the Byers' home as Joyce plugged in

the last string of lights. She stared around at her house. Colorful bulbs covered her ceiling and walls, dangling like luminescent candy. A knocking at the front door interrupted her observation, and she hurried over to answer it. Karen Wheeler stood before her, and Joyce couldn't help but slump a little in disappointment. Karen stared at the lights behind Joyce.

"Hey!" said Karen.

"Hey, Karen," Joyce replied.

Karen, holding a dish in one hand and Holly's hand in the other, said, "I brought you a casserole."

"Oh, thank you, uh..." Joyce hesitated. Not wanting another person thinking she'd gone insane, but not wanting to be rude either, she said, "...uh, you wanna...come in?"

---

Hopper parked his truck in front of the local library and, with Powell, he entered the building.

"Hey, Marissa. How you doin'?" Hopper asked the woman behind the librarian's desk.

Not at all pleased to see him, Marissa said, "You have a lot of nerve showing up here."

Bemused, Hopper asked, "What?"

"You could have at least called, said, 'Marissa. Hey, it's not going to work out. Sorry I wasted your time. I'm a dick.'"

Powell glanced sideways at Hopper, surprised, and Hopper smiled awkwardly.

"Yep. Uhhh, I'm sorry, uh...maybe we could go out again next week?" he smirked in what he hoped was a charming way.

Marissa looked at Powell, "Is he for real?"

Powell's eyes traveled slowly back to Hopper, who breathed deeply,

at a loss for words. Looking away, he asked, "Newspapers. You guys got newspapers around here?"

Marissa pulled out two small boxes of manila cards from the directory. "We have the *New York Times*, *The Post*, all the big ones. Organized by year and topic. You can find the corresponding microfiche in the reading room."

"Okay, we're looking for anything on the Hawkins National Laboratory."

"Well, shouldn't you be looking for that missing kid?" she asked.

Hopper nodded, "Yeah. We are. Uh, so why don't you start with the times, and we'll check out *The Post*."

He grinned at her, and she scoffed.

"Hmm," she murmured and she paced away.

When she was out of earshot Powell asked, amused, "The librarian?"

Hopper shrugged and they began searching through the card directory.

As the day wore on they eventually found themselves sitting at microfiche machines researching articles about Hawkins Lab. Hopper skimmed through one titled, "Hawkins Lab Blocks Inquiry." Printing articles with potential leads Hopper found another titled, "Alleged Experiments, Abuse" and he read,

*Terry Ives' legal case against embattled research scientist Dr. Martin Brenner suffered another setback today when the district attorney's office formally refused to press criminal charges against Brenner, his fellow researchers, assistants, or the projects sponsors, citing lack of evidence.*

Another report featured an image of several patients and a tall doctor labeled as Brenner.

Hopper skimmed through an article with the heading, "Dr. Martin Brenner Named in Lawsuit"



*Senior researcher Doctor Martin Brenner and seven other staff researchers have been named in a new lawsuit filed today on behalf of former federal research study participant, Terry Ives. Dr. Brenner's attorney in conjunction with the Department of Energy has asked the circuit court to seal the details of the lawsuit until the attorney general's office can determine that no federal...*

But Hopper skipped ahead to the part of the article that featured the nature of the lawsuit, reading,

*...her newborn daughter for scientific research. Following an investigation, the district attorney has already declined to press criminal kidnapping charges against the research facility and staff, citing lack of evidence. Dr. Brenner's attorney called Ms. Ives' allegations baseless and tragic, citing Dr. Brenner's excellent reputation, his twenty recent peer-reviewed scientific papers...*

He next found an article with an image of a young, beautiful woman with the title "Terry Ives Suing" and a quote underneath, "They took my daughter."

*After the district attorney's office declined to press criminal charges citing lack of evidence, local resident Terry Ives is not giving up her search for justice for herself and her daughter, and this morning filed a lawsuit against research scientist Dr. Martin Brenner and his staff.*

*Ms. Ives suit seeks unspecified damages against Dr. Brenner and his facility, alleging physical abuse, sleep deprivation, malnourishment, and kidnapping.*

Hopper sighed puzzled. He had never heard of another missing child in Hawkins, yet the articles stated this woman had been local. From all appearances however, it didn't seemed that any search had undergone for a missing baby girl, or that anyone believed a girl had gone missing. But how could that be? How could a district attorney's office fail to press charges and cite lack of evidence, if an actual child was gone? Surely there would be record of a child being born to Ms. Ives or even a stillborn certificate.

If she was unhappy about the experiments she had participated in, if the source of her disgruntlement was that she felt they had been

inhumane towards her, why accuse them of kidnapping if it could easily be proved that she had no kid? In none of the articles he found regarding the lawsuit, did Hopper read of Ms. Ives requesting to be paid a sum. She appeared to have never asked for anything but her daughter, leaving Hopper with only one question. Why was she so convinced Brenner had a girl which no one else seemed to believe ever existed?

---

A cooking timer ticked away in Joyce Byers' kitchen as she and Karen sat talking, Holly listening quietly.

"Will always loves Christmas, you know. So I thought if I...I put the lights up..." She gestured around at the dangling strings explaining away the phenomenon that was her house. "I don't know he...I'd feel like he was home somehow. I-it's silly, I know."

Karen immediately placed her hand over Joyce's. "No. No, it's not silly. How is Jonathan holding up?"

"You know, he's good at taking care of himself. He always has been, you know? I...I mean he thinks I'm losing my mind, but..." A light flickered in the living room and Joyce became distracted as she frowned intently at the other room.

Karen, who had noticed nothing, followed Joyce's gaze, "Is something the matter?"

Joyce's eyes remained trained on the lights in the living room. "Uh, no. No I just...we're having electrical problems."

Karen placed her hands over Joyce's again. "Joyce. I want you to know something. If you need anything, anything at all...Ted and I are here for you."

Unnoticed by either woman, a few of the Christmas lights lit up down the hall to the bedrooms. Holly looked over, and was fascinated by the sparkling colors.

"Thank you. Thanks," said Joyce, looking down at the table.

Karen smiled warmly and said, "Okay," while her daughter climbed

down from her seat and trotted off down the hall, unseen.

Holly followed the lights as they lit up in a trail to the bedrooms, and in the kitchen Joyce asked, "How...how's Mike dealing with this? Is he uh, okay?"

"Mike, uh, I don't know. He skipped school yesterday. He's never done anything like that before," Karen answered. Holly entered Will's bedroom on the right. Inside the lamps flickered on and off like some sort of light show. They flickered faster and faster and Holly stood in the middle of the room fascinated and curious as she circled around watching the lights dance across from lamp to lamp.

Abruptly the lights stopped as if the power was cut out and little Holly stared around the dim room as a low growling issued from the wall by the window. Holly walked over to it and stood before the blank surface and she could hear something inside it.

In the kitchen the cooking timer went off with a loud *ding!*

"Let me throw in that casserole, okay?" said Karen, and she stood and stepped over the counter, but as she turned to face the table she saw Holly's empty chair. "Oh, where's Holly?"

Joyce frowned as she too realized Holly was missing, and she glanced down the hall.

In the bedroom, Holly stared at the blank wall, and the little girl began to feel afraid though she did not know of what. She continued to watch however, and as she listened to the growling she thought of a dog that had once growled at her from a house she had walked past with her mother. The wall began to bulge outward but before she could see what was trying to come out Holly was lifted into the air by Joyce.

"Hey!" said Joyce, as she carried her out of the room and thrust her into Karen's arms. "She shouldn't be here."

"Oh, I'm sorry. She's quite the explorer these days," Karen chuckled.

Noticing the fearful look on Holly's face, Joyce asked, "Wait, did you see something?"

"Yeah," said Holly.

"What did...what did you see? Tell me. What did you see? What-" but Joyce was too intense for the little girl, who drew back in her mother's arms.

"Joyce - Joyce!" Karen interrupted her from the interrogation.

Joyce, suddenly firm, said, "Listen...Karen, thank you for the casserole, but I need you to leave. Okay?"

She ushered Karen and Holly out of her house, Karen looking appalled and confused.

---

Outside of her school Nancy held a payphone to her ear, listening to the line ring. "Come on, come on, come on."

"Hello?" came a woman's voice.

"Hi! Hi, uh, hi Ms. Holland, it's Nancy."

Ms. Holland stood in her kitchen, chopping up celery for dinner, her shoulder holding the phone to her ear. "Oh, Nancy, how are you?"

"Good. I'm good. Um, I was just wondering, uh, is Barb there?"

"Mmm, no she hasn't come home yet," she replied.

"But she did come home, right? After the vigil?" Nancy asked.

Ms. Holland took hold of the phone with her hand, instantly concerned, "No, she said she was staying with you last night."

Nancy felt a sinking in her stomach and a painful pressure in her chest. "Right, yes. She did, sorry. I meant did she come home, this morning? I think she left some textbooks and she was gonna go pick them up."

Ms. Holland breathed again, relieved, "Oh, um, no, I haven't seen her."

"Do - do you know what? I just remembered...she's at the library," said Nancy.

Feeling concerned again, Ms. Holland said, "Nancy, will you please have her call me as soon as you find her?"

"Yeah. Yeah I will. Sorry to bother you," she hung up, more worried than ever. She did not know what to do.

Over the school grounds the bell rang and Jonathan retrieved his car keys from his pocket. But stepping up to his car he found Steve sitting atop it, and Tommy, Carol, and the girl from the red room stood around him. As he approached, Steve hopped down from the hood.

"Hey, man," Steve said.

"What's going on?" asked Jonathan, though he knew what they wanted.

"Nicole here was, uh, telling us about your work," Steve answered.

"We've heard great things," said Carol.

"Yeah, sounds cool," piped Tommy.

"...and we'd just love to take a look," said Steve menacingly. "You know, as...connoisseurs of art."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jonathan said and he tried to shove past them, but Tommy swiped his backpack from his shoulder as he did.

"Oh no. Oh..." said Steve, innocently.

Beginning to feel panicked, Jonathan said, "Hey. Please give me my bag. No just..."

But Tommy threw the bag to Steve who caught it looking at Jonathan. "Man, he is totally trembling. He must really have something to hide. Okay, here we go."

He turned his back and set the bag on the hood of the car, then

pulled out a stack of photographs from within. "Ah," he muttered spinning around. "Here we go. Oh man..."

Steve sifted through the images of the night before.

"Let me see," said Tommy, snatching the stack from Steve. Glancing at them, he looked back at Jonathan amused and disgusted. "Dude."

Carol hurried to view them, too. Taking them from Tommy she turned and glared at Jonathan, "Yeah, this isn't creepy at all."

"I was looking for my brother," Jonathan tried to explain, already knowing they'd never understand, especially with how it looked. Even to himself, he had to admit that he never should have taken those photos.

"No. No, this is called stalking," said Steve.

Joining the group around the car, Nancy asked, confused, "What's going on?"

They all turned to look at her.

"There's the starring lady," said Tommy.

"What?" asked Nancy.

"This creep was spying on us last night," Carol accused, gesturing at Jonathan. She pulled a photo from the stack she held and handed it to Nancy as she watched Jonathan for his reaction. "He was probably gonna save this one for later."

Nancy took the photo and with shock she recognized herself undressing in Steve's window.

Steve watched Jonathan with beady eyes, and said, "See, you can tell that he knows it was wrong, but," (Nancy glanced at Jonathan confused and embarrassed. He too looked back at her but quickly looked away as he saw her looking at him.) "...man that's the thing about perverts...it's hardwired into 'em."

He stood in front of Jonathan, insultingly close, and he pretended to

straighten Jonathan's shirt, brushing a speck of dust away before roughly tapping his shoulder. "You know, they just can't help themselves." He ripped one of the photos to pieces, and Tommy laughed. "So..." he tossed the pieces to the ground. "We'll just have to take away his toy."

Nancy, still humiliated, but somehow pitying Jonathan, knew what was coming.

"Steve," she whispered.

Jonathan realized too, as Steve grabbed his bag, "No, please, not the camera."

He rushed forward but Tommy pushed him back threateningly.

"No, no, wait, wait...Tommy. Tommy," Steve stopped Tommy, and walked over holding Jonathan's camera. Tommy backed off chuckling.

"It's okay," Steve said, and he held the camera out for Jonathan to take. "Here you go, man."

But as Jonathan reached out to take it, Steve dropped it and the camera crashed to the ground, the lens shattering. Tommy gasped and laughed.

With a last menacing look at Jonathan Steve said, "Come on, let's go. The game's about to start."

"Boo," taunted Tommy as he followed Steve back towards the school.

Carol ripped another photo to pieces and tossed it to the ground with a flourish. "Bye."

Jonathan bent to retrieve his shattered camera, and Nancy stood there feeling humiliated, exposed and angry. But then she noticed one of the pieces to the photo Carol had just torn apart and she too bent to the ground to examine it. The image showed Barb sitting on Steve's diving board and peering into the water. She knew it must have been while she was upstairs with Steve, because Barb had never left the lawnchair during the party until she had cut her hand on the

knife and went inside to clean up. As she gazed at the photo thinking of Barb, Jonathan peeked over at her, wanting to explain and apologize.

"Hey, Nance! Come on!" Steve hollered.

Rushing, Nancy gathered the rest of the scraps from the torn picture, and she peered once more at Jonathan feeling more angry. It must have shown on her face because Jonathan looked down, ashamed. She ran off to join Steve who put his arm around her as they walked back toward the school. Fragments of the other shredded photo blew off in the wind, and Jonathan knelt alone over the shards of his broken camera.

---

Wearing a jacket over Mike's sweater, Eleven approached a fence by the telephone poles behind Mike's house, feeling antsy and nervous. She shook her hands as she waited for Mike and she peered at the watch around her wrist.

"Three-one-five. Three-one-five," she whispered, as she paced in her spot by the fence. "Three-one-five."

A cat meowed nearby and Eleven glanced up to see a ginger tabby cat behind the fence. She looked into its eyes, and the cat growled at her. Her breathes grew heavy as another memory crashed around her ears and tears stung her eyes as she recalled the last time she had seen a cat.

---

*A white, furry cat crouched behind the bars of its cage. Its ears laid back upon its soft head and the cat sat curled, drawing into itself. The animal hissed and growled at Eleven as she stared at it through the bars, electrodes attached to her head like before. A machine recording the wavelengths from her brain was going haywire with activity as Papa and other scientists watched through a TV monitor.*

*Eleven whimpered and cried as she stared into the cat's eyes. The cat continued to hiss and growl but it could only sit afraid and defenseless. Eleven glanced up at Papa through the window in the wall, hoping he'd tell her she could stop. That the test was over. But he said nothing, and she*



*focused again on the cat, which only growled and hissed, terrified for its life. Eleven wept as she pitied the creature, and she looked at Papa again, then back at the cat. She knew what she needed to do, knew she was supposed to focus on crushing the cat like she did the can, but she could only cry as she noticed its eyes, dilated in fear, and its ears held back as if trying to make itself smaller. She knew what she was supposed to do but realized she couldn't, and she pulled the electrodes off her head. The machine reading her brain printed out a thin, flat line of inactivity.*

*Papa stared at her through the window and she peered back, scared, because she knew what was next, but she shook her head no anyways. Papa looked down disappointed. And once again Eleven flailed and screamed as she was carried away to the dark room.*

*"No! No!" she hollered. This time they carried her backwards, so that she could see Papa watching as they took her away. "Papa! Papa! Papa! Papa! Ahhh!"*

*The men rounded the corner to the room she so hated.*

*"No!" she screamed again, but they dragged her there regardless and tossed her to the hard, cold floor inside. Eleven landed on her arms and fury flooded within her, and this time, when she stood and spun around, she didn't run to the door. Instead, she focused her mind on the closing door and she forced it open causing one of the men to fly backwards into the wall behind him. He hit the wall so hard that after he fell to the ground he left a cavity in the tiled wall, and Eleven knew the man was dead. The other man stared down at his lifeless partner before turning toward her, and he held out his baton to shock her but she had turned to focus on him, her gaze calm and furious, and with a twitch of her head the man's neck broke with a sickening crack and he too fell dead upon the floor.*

*Suddenly exhausted, Eleven slumped against the wall of the room, blood pouring from both nostrils as well as her ears. Her skin had turned grayish pale and clammy. She felt sick and weaker than she had ever been before. Papa stepped into view amid the dead men, peering around at the damage before glancing at Eleven. She stared up at him afraid, but he entered the room, and he slowly, tenderly reached out to her and held her face between his hands. She began to sob at the gentle gesture.*

*"Incredible," said Papa. He bent to lift her into his arms as she began to fall and he pulled her cradle-like into the air. She felt herself carried away as Papa stepped over the dead men, smiling down into Eleven's weeping face. And he carried her off down the hall.*

---

"El!"

Her memory disrupted, Eleven turned to peer behind her and found Mike, Dustin and Lucas approaching her with their bikes. Mike paused looking at her closely, noticing her troubled face.

"You okay?" he asked her. She nodded and Mike wheeled his bike around so that it faced away from her. Patting the backseat, he said, "Hop on. We only have a few hours."

Walking up to the bike, she swung her leg over so that she sat straddling the same seat she had ridden the night Mike had found her and brought her home with him. He too swung a leg over to sit in front of her. Holding onto his shoulders, Eleven propped her feet on the foot rests near her ankles, and Mike followed Lucas and Dustin as they peddled off down the road.

---

Tommy sat on a bench within the high school halls, Carol's head in his lap, and Steve sitting opposite them on the floor against the lockers, while Nancy remained on her feet, leaning beside Steve.

"So, I told Mr. Mundy, 'The solution of ten plus Y equals...blow me'," Carol was saying, and Tommy laughed.

"Bull, if you did that, you'd be in detention right now," said Steve.

"Saturday," shot Carol.

"I bet Mr. Mundy's still a virgin," joked Tommy.

"Oh, he's so a virgin," Carol said confidently.

"Maybe you should blow him, Carol. Help your grades a bit," Tommy snickered when Carol smacked him.

Nancy, who could no longer stand to listen to the conversation, began to walk away. She couldn't hold off any longer.

"Whoa Nance, where you going?" asked Steve.

Nancy turned thinking fast. "I - I totally forgot. I told my mom I would um...I would do something with her." She knew the lie was pathetic, but she realized she didn't care much. There was something she had to check, now.

Steve scrambled to his feet. "Well, what do you mean? The game's about to start."

"I'm sorry," she said dismissively and she hurried off.

Glancing back at Tommy and Carol, Steve asked, "I - what the hell's wrong with her?"

"Maybe she freaked out when you went all psycho on the psycho," suggested Tommy.

"Oh, give me a break," scoffed Steve.

"What'd you expect, dating Miss Perfect?" Carol replied. She blew a large pink bubble in her chewing gum. It popped over her lips as they all stared down the hall after Nancy.

---

Strolling through the woods, Eleven glanced sideways at Mike as he walked his bike quietly beside her. She noticed the abrasion on his chin, and reading into his unusual silence she asked, "Why did they hurt you?"

"What?" asked Mike his eyes meeting hers. She pointed at his chin, and he quickly looked away his face suddenly feeling hot. "Oh, that. Uh... I just fell at recess."

"Mike..."

"Yeah?"

"Friends tell the truth," she reminded him.

Mike sighed, embarrassed, and admitted, "I was tripped by this mouth breather, Troy, okay?"

"Mouth breather?"

"Yeah, you know...a dumb person. A knucklehead," he tried to explain.

"Knucklehead?" she still didn't quite understand, but she could tell he meant it as an insult. Behind them, Dustin and Lucas followed, listening to the pair's conversation.

"I don't know why I just didn't tell you. Everyone at school knows," Mike continued. If he was honest with himself, it had been nice having someone in his life who didn't know he was a loser in school. "I just didn't want you to think I was such a wastoid, you know?"

"Mike..."

"Yeah?"

Eleven looked straight into his eyes as she said, "I understand."

"Oh. Okay, cool," Mike said.

"Cool," she repeated, grinning at him. He considered her for a moment, an odd feeling forming in his stomach, almost like the feeling he would get on the first day of school. His mom called it butterflies, but he didn't think they could be the same thing, because these were more pleasant than nerve-racking. Eleven was watching her feet as she walked through the woods and she did not notice the small smile cross Mike's face as he watched her.

---

Three blocks from Steve's house, Nancy walked along the rode where she had instructed Barb to pull over the night before and, with growing dread, Nancy saw Barb's car still parked where they had left it. She looked inside and she could see the sweatshirt she had changed out of before the party. She peered around for the keys to see if maybe Barb had at least returned to her car at some point, but she saw nothing.

Looking around the quiet neighborhood, Nancy called, "Barb? Barb!"

Nancy walked over to Steve's house and entered the backyard through the tall, wooden fence. The swimming pool sat full, and unmoving. She stared around at the empty lawn chairs and at the woods beyond.

"Barb?" But no answer came and her fear peaked, but then she heard rustling in the trees from the other end of the property. Tracking through the edge of the woods Nancy found a clearing, and she wondered if this had been where Jonathan had hid, taking photos of her and the others.

"Barb?" she called out quietly to the trees. She heard another disturbance and turned behind her, feeling oddly jumpy. "Barb?"

More leaves rustled behind her, but this time it was accompanied by a strange screech. She spun around, and though she only glimpsed it for less than a second, Nancy could have sworn that it was man without a face. She stumbled in her haste to run away, and she instead hit the ground with a rough grunt. Panicking, Nancy scrambled back to her feet and fled, glancing behind her for the strange, faceless man.

---

Nothing but the swinging bench on Joyce's porch betrayed a sound at the Byers' home as Joyce stood in the kitchen smoking a cigarette. To her left the lights began to pop on, and the dog sat barking at them. Putting her cigarette in the sink, she went to investigate, but she could only stare, confused, as the lights twinkled on one by one in a straight line. As she watched, the lights would all turn off then form the trail again. So she followed the line to the wall on the far side of her living room trying to discern a pattern or meaning in the lights. In front of her wall there was a cabinet so she pushed it aside as she remembered, with a jolt, the in-built cubby. Was Will inside perhaps? She hurriedly shoved the cabinet aside and opened the doors, but it was completely bare. She sighed in disappointment.

Of course he wouldn't be in the cubby. It didn't make sense for him to be, yet she couldn't help but hope, and the lights seemed to have led here. Was it Will? Was he trying to tell her something? About the

wall or the cubby? Yesterday, something had tried to come through the wall, so maybe Will was trying to tell her that she could come to him through here. It was crazy. She knew that. But all of this was crazy. The wall, the lights. Something was happening, something otherworldly, and Will was trapped in the middle of it. She knew he was trying to speak to her, to tell her where he was. So how could she make it easier for him?

Joyce turned and pulled out a tangled wad of Christmas lights. These were not colorful but plain, white light. She hadn't used them because the bulbs were so much smaller, she feared if only one lit up she wouldn't notice. Taking the bundle, she crawled into the cubby. She had to sit hunched with her knees drawn up close to her chest. She cradled the lights between her chest and knees. Holding them before her she bowed her head over it and closed her eyes, almost as if she were praying to the lights.

"Will, are you here?" she asked hopefully. Almost immediately the ball of lights glowed brightly in her hands, and she gasped excitedly. "Okay! Good, good, good, good, good."

She thought hard for a moment, about how to communicate with him. "Are you...um, blink once for yes, twice for no. C-c-can you do that for me, sweetie? Can you do..."

The lights shone brightly and then faded to dark.

"Oh, good boy. Good boy," she began to cry as she prepared to ask the question she knew she must ask. Had been wondering in the back of her mind since she first realized he was using the lights to try and communicate. "Baby, I need to know...Are you alive?"

The lights shone bright once more and faded, but they did not blink again and Joyce sighed in relief, her breathing suddenly easier than it had been in awhile. She asked her next question.

"Are you safe?"

The lights sat dark in her hands for a short moment before, once again, they shone bright. But it was brief as they then faded before shining again in her hands, signifying Will's answer. No.

"Ah..." she exclaimed with a trembling breath. "I need to know where to find you honey. Where ...where are you? Can you... can you tell me where you are? Can you..."

She couldn't think of anyway to form the question as a yes or no, and she whimpered, feeling powerless. "Please, baby, I need to find you. Tell me what to do. Please just..."

She stared uselessly at the lights, clinging to them, her one channel of communication with her boy. "Will..."

And then it came to her.

Moments later Joyce was prying open an old, battered can of solid black paint. Using a paintbrush, she painted an "A" over the living room couch, making sure to position it under the bulb of a Christmas light. She continued on to "B" , then "C", and "D" as she quickly painted the alphabet on her wall.

---

In a large bowl, Karen stirred vegetables with a wooden spoon to go with their dinner for that night as Nancy came in through the front door.

"Hey! You're home early! How was the game?" Karen asked. She looked over at Nancy only to see her daughter appearing lost, scared and crying. "Nancy? What's the matter?"

She hurried over, and Nancy stood before her, trembling as she said, "It's Barb. I think...something happened. Something terrible."

---

"I don't know, Chief," said Powell to Hopper as they sat across from each other at a desk in the library, a light shining dimly over the articles spread before them.

"What don't you know?" Hopper asked frustrated.

"This lady, Terry Ives, sounds like a real nut to me," Powell stated. "Her kid was taken for LSD mind control experiments? She's been discredited. Claim was thrown out."

"Okay, forget about her," he sighed. He slid the article about Terry Ives aside and presented one titled "MKUltra Exposed" to Powell instead. It included the photo of Dr. Martin Brenner with several patients.

"Take a look at this," he said, pointing at the doctor. "Dr. Martin Brenner."

"Who?"

"Brenner," he said meaningfully. "He runs Hawkins Lab."

"Okay," said Powell slowly, lost.

Hopper sat back in his chair. "You don't find that interesting?"

Powell shook his head, "Not really. He was involved in some hippie crap back in the day, so what?"

"No, this isn't hippie crap. This is CIA-sanctioned research," Hopper said, imperative as he leaned forward again. He needed Powell to be on the same page as him.

"Doesn't mean he had anything to do with our kid," said Powell.

"Come on. Look at that," he pointed at the photo again. "Hospital gowns. All of 'em. Now that piece of fabric that the teacher found by the pipe. That sure looked like a hospital gown to me, huh? Am I wrong?"

"I don't know, Chief," said Powell again, still skeptical.

Hopper sighed, annoyed. "Come on, man. Work with me here. I'm not saying that there's some grand conspiracy. I'm just...I'm saying maybe something happened. Maybe Will was at the wrong place at the wrong he saw something that he shouldn't have."

"It's a reach," Powell answered.

"It's a start," Hopper maintained.

Callahan's voice came over Powell's radio. "Hey Powell, is the chief



with you?"

Reaching across the table to pull the radio from Powell's shoulder, Hopper transmitted, "Hopper here. What do you got?"

A minute later Hopper and Powell burst through the library doors and raced down the steps from the entrance. They ran for Hopper's truck and before Hopper had even fully seated himself, he had turned the engine on and started the lights and sirens. With screeching tires, Hopper backed out onto the street and sped out of town.

---

Dusk had fallen as the boys walked their bikes, with headlights shining, down the driveway towards Will's house, following Eleven who now strode with purpose. She came to a stop in front of the Byers' house, and she turned to Mike.

"Here," she said.

"Yeah, this is where Will lives," Mike said slowly, impressed she had known this, but worried she might have misunderstood about taking them to the place where he currently was.

"Hiding," she said.

"No. No, this is where he lives. He's missing from here. Understand?" explained Mike.

Lucas and Dustin caught up with Mike and Eleven. Dustin dropped his bike to the ground, exhausted. Lucas frowned at Mike and asked, "What are we doing here?"

"She said he's hiding here," responded Mike.

"Um...no!" griped Lucas.

"I swear, if we walked all the way out here for nothing-" Dustin started.

"That's exactly what we did. I told you she didn't know what the hell she was talking about!" complained Lucas, gesturing at Eleven.

Frustrated at his friends and worried they may have been right, Mike turned to Eleven, "Why did you bring us here?"

Eleven looked confused and worried, "I-"

Lucas interrupted her, "Mike, don't waste your time with her."

"What do you want to do then?" asked Mike, angrily.

"Call the cops, like we should have done yesterday!"

"We are not calling the cops!"

Dustin, who had stopped listening to the argument, stepped forward as he stared at something off in the distance. "Hey guys..."

"What other choice do we have?" Lucas questioned Mike.

Dustin cut across Mike's retort. "Guys!"

They all turned to see what Dustin was yelling about as sirens sounded in the distance. On the road outside of the Byers' property two cop cars and an ambulance sped by, lights flashing and sirens blaring.

"Will," said Mike.

Simultaneously, the boys pivoted and ran to their bikes, Eleven hopped onto the back of Mike's, and they sped after the emergency responders, their tired legs paddling hard and fast.

---

Joyce finished painting the letter "Z" on her living room wall, then exhaled deeply. Quickly setting the paint can and brush on the coffee table she turned and faced the three rows of letters she had created.

"Okay. Okay, baby talk to me," she rubbed her hands together, anxiously as she waited for something to happen, for her idea to work. "Talk to me. Where are you?"

The light over the "R" lit up.

"R! Good, good, good, good," the small bulb flickered off. "That's good. Come on, come on."

Next the light over "I" flickered on.

"I," she stated, and as the lights continued going in and out Joyce read the corresponding letters out loud. "G', 'H', 'T', 'H', 'E', 'R', 'E'."

It ended.

"Right here. Right here?" Joyce said in confusion. "I - I don't know what that means. I need you to tell me what to do. What should I do? How do I get to you? How do I find you? What should I do?"

Panic was filling her again, what could he possibly mean? But as she struggled to find meaning of what Will had said through the lights, the bulb over the "R" lit up again, and she watched as next the "U" lit up, and then finally the "N". Run. A chill passed through her as the red light hovered over that last letter, and suddenly all the lights across the house began blinking wildly, and the wall behind Joyce bulged out. She turned, gasping in fear, as a clawed arm tore through the wall paper as if it was goo. And as she watched a horrific creature began tearing through the wall, one shaped like a skinny human but with no face and its body pale and hunched, growling like an animal. In terror, Joyce fled for her life, and the monster screeched behind her, still entangled in the slimy wallpaper.

---

The sirens of the emergency vehicles still wailed as the boys and Eleven rode through the woods. Hoppers' truck flew down a woody trail nearby and the kids followed unseen in a field of tall, wild grass. They witnessed Hopper turn down a dirt patch leading to an emergency scene staged next to Sattler's quarry. Hopper drove straight through the middle of the site, firefighters and medics walking about. He came to a stop as Callahan came into view and past him he could see men in the water pulling something. A feeling like a large pit seemed to burst open in his chest.

"Oh, Jesus," he exclaimed as he climbed out of his truck and he bypassed Callahan who bowed his head as Hopper ran down to the shore, holding his hat onto his head. Standing behind two firefighters

he prayed, quietly, "Oh God. Please tell me it's not the kid."

The men stood watching, chatter issuing from radios, as unnoticed, Mike and his friends pulled up behind a fire truck. Stowing their bikes to the side, they ran to the edge of the truck and peered around it at the men in the water who at that moment lifted a small body, dripping wet, and laid it into a life basket floating on the surface.

Hopper felt a terrible, sickening sinking in him as they began to pull the basket toward dry land and he glanced away. Turning back he found himself unable to watch any further and he stalked away from the scene.

Behind the fire engine Mike gripped the rail bolted to the back of the fire truck and said, numbly, "It's not Will. It can't be."

But as they watched the life basket approach the shore, and the men lifted it from the water, Lucas said, sadly, "It's Will. It's really Will."

Mike turned and walked away. Eleven, baffled and distraught, tried to explain herself to him, "Mike..."

However, he slapped her hand away in anger, and she jumped back in shock as he yelled at her, "Mike? Mike what? You were supposed to help us find him alive! You said he was alive! Why did you lie to us? What's wrong with you? What is wrong with you?"

But Eleven couldn't explain. She didn't understand, and she looked sadly at her only friend who stared back, hurt and angry. "Mike..."

"What?" he snapped, and she flinched again at the venom in his voice. She shook her head, confused, at a loss for words, and he stormed away toward his bike.

"Mike. Come on," Lucas called. "Don't do this, man. Mike..."

"Mike, where are you going?" Dustin asked, crying. "Mike!"

But Mike did not answer as he gathered up his bike, hopped on, and sped away.

"Mike!" hollered Lucas.

As the boys watched their friend bike away, Eleven paced in her spot, her hands over her face in anguish as she tried to perceive what had happened. How had she misread, when she'd felt it so strongly, felt Will so close?

---

Running as fast as she could, her breaths coming in sharp, jagged pants, Joyce constantly checked behind her for the monster that had torn into her house. She therefore, failed to notice the approaching car driving down the road until it braked hard in front of her, the headlights shining brightly. She screamed as she halted in the middle of the road and she stood shaking and panting from her run as Jonathan leapt from the car.

"Mom? Mom, what happened?" he asked worriedly as Joyce whimpered and reached for him. He rushed over and pulled her into a hug. "It's okay. Hey."

---

Karen sat beside a distraught Nancy, as she and Barb's parents listened to her in the Wheeler's living room. Suddenly, Mike burst through the front door. Quickly rising from the couch, Karen went to meet him in the foyer to ask him to go upstairs and leave them in privacy.

"Michael..." but as she neared him she found that he was trembling and crying. "What's wrong?"

He merely stood there shaking and sobbing until he reached out for her, and she instantly embraced him. Mike clung to his mother, her arms wrapped around him and he let himself weep bitterly, as he never had before.

---

On a dark road lit, by the headlights of the Byers' car, Jonathan held his mother as she sobbed and trembled in his arms. Approaching in the distance, were several vehicles with flashing lights and piercing sirens.

## 5. Chapter 4 - The Body

### Chapter Four - The Body

The starry night was disrupted with the flashes of emergency lights from the police cars in front of the Byers' home. Callahan interviewed Joyce and Jonathan as Powell and Hopper searched the small home.

"This the wall she was talking about, Chief?" asked Powell, holding up his flashlight to the wall from which the monster had previously burst through. Hopper examined the smooth and undamaged wall, troubled.

Not long after, Hopper spoke to Joyce as she stood staring, confused and terrified, at the blank stretch of wall. Hopper's voice seemed to come from some distant place as he said, "A trooper found something in the uh, water that's at the quarry. Our working theory right now is that Will...crashed his bike, uh...made his way over the quarry and, uh...accidentally fell in. The earth must have given way. Joyce? Joyce? Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Joyce felt like she was reeling, she didn't know what to believe, but of one thing, she was certain.

"No," she said. "Whoever you found...is not my boy. It's not Will."

"Joyce," Hopper reached out to her.

"No, you don't understand. I talked to him...a half hour ago," she whispered. She walked over to the wall with the inbuilt cubby, pointing. "He was...He was here."

She opened the cubby and pulled out the wad of Christmas lights she had used earlier to communicate with Will.

"He was... he was talking with these."

"Talking?"

"Uh-huh. One blink for yes, two for no. And...and uh...and then I made this," she gestured at the alphabet painted haphazardly on her

living room wall in black paint. "So he could talk to me. 'Cause he was hiding...from that...that thing."

"The thing that came out of the wall? The thing that chased you?" Hopper asked delicately.

Jonathan came to stand beside Hopper, watching his mother in confusion and horror.

"Yeah. Yeah," she confirmed.

"Mom, come on, please," Jonathan pleaded. "You've gotta stop this."

"No, maybe he's...it's after him! He's in danger!" she grasped Hopper's wrists. "We have to find him! We-"

"What exactly was this thing? It was some kind of animal, you said?" asked Hopper trying to understand what her mind was inventing. Maybe there was some way for him to show her that it wasn't real.

"Uh, no it was...it was almost, human, but it wasn't. It...it had these long arms and...it didn't have a face," she struggled to explain what she had seen.

Jonathan turned and walked away having heard enough. Hopper held out his arms, trying to think of some way to help her.

"It didn't have a face?" he repeated quietly as he stepped forward to calm her as her voice fell into trembling whimpers. "Joyce."

"It didn't have a face," she repeated.

Hopper sat her down and knelt before her, peering up into her petrified face. "Listen to me. After Sarah...I saw her, too. And I heard her. I didn't know what was real. And then I figured out that it was in my mind. And I had to pack all that away."

Joyce's eyes closed in denial as he spoke, but he continued on. "Otherwise, I was gonna fall down a hole...that I couldn't get out of."

"No you're...you're talking about grief," Joyce whispered. "This is different."

"I'm just saying that you-"

"No, I know what you're saying Hop. I swear to you, I know what I saw. And I'm not crazy."

"I'm not saying that you're crazy," Hopper emphasized.

"No,.. You are. And I understand, but...God, I...I need you to believe me. Please," she begged desperately. "Please."

"Listen...I think you should go to the morgue tomorrow and see him for yourself. It'll give you the answers that you need. But tonight..."

"Oh, God," Joyce moaned feeling incredibly alone.

"...I want you to try to get some sleep, if you can," finished Hopper, and Joyce slouched in defeat. It was too much, she realized, for him to believe if he hadn't seen it himself.

Hopper walked away and Joyce stood to stare at the wall again, thinking of Will hiding from that monster.

Outside, Hopper walked out to his truck, and after climbing in he started the engine. But after a pause in which he peered at the house he wearily shut the truck off and leaned back with a sigh. Lowering his hat over his eyes, he settled back for a long, chilly night.

In his room, Jonathan lay against his pillows wearing headphones. He cried and hugged himself as he tried to let the music carry him far away, but he could think of nothing but Will, and how he would never see his brother again. Just outside his door, Joyce stood wanting to enter so she could comfort him. Make him believe that all was not lost, but she knew he would never believe what he thought were the hallucinations of a mad woman.

With purpose and sheer determination, Joyce marched through her backyard to the shed. She entered it with a fury and as she stomped back out, she carried with her an ax. Murder entered her heart as she thought about that creature, and she sat on the couch in her living room, the ax laid across her knees, and waited.

---



Ted and Karen sadly watched as a news reporter recounted the scene at Sattler's quarry.

"Byers' body was found in the water of this quarry, by state police earlier this evening," said the reporter as he stood in front of a scene where police and state troopers now investigated. "It was discovered by state trooper David O'bannon, just after dark. The state police are mounting an investigation to determine Byers' cause of death, but an initial inquiry..."

"Should I go down and talk to Michael?" Ted asked his wife.

"Give him time," she answered. "He'll come to us when he's ready."

Below them on the basement sofa, Mike sifted through crayon drawings of dragons, mythical creatures, and other characters Will had drawn for their campaigns. He used to be slightly jealous that he did not have the same skill, but now he would give anything to ask Will to draw another picture. Static from the radio that Eleven sat fiddling with in her den interrupted his thoughts.

"Can you please stop that?" asked Mike, annoyed. She switched the radio off, but as Mike went back to the drawings she turned it back on and the static continued. "Are you deaf? I thought we were friends, you know? But friends tell each other the truth. And they definitely don't lie to each other. You made me think Will was okay, that he was still out there, but he wasn't. He wasn't!"

She looked away sadly but Mike continued anyhow, "Maybe you thought you were helping, but you weren't. You hurt me. Do you understand? What you did sucks. Lucas was right about you. All along."

Eleven looked back at him and saw that he had gone back to the drawings, and so she returned her concentration to the radio searching the void between channels like the void between places. Mike ran his hand over the sketch of their game pieces Will had brought over most recently. He decided it was his favorite, and as he did the static over in the small den he had helped create for Eleven grew louder, then suddenly, a soft voice sang over the radio.

"So come on and let me know, should I stay or should I go?" sang Will.

Mike glanced up at Eleven who sat looking back at him holding the radio, a trickle of blood running from her left nostril.

Again, Will sang, "Should I stay or should I go now?"

Mike threw the drawings aside and ran over to kneel before Eleven, and she held the radio out for him.

"If I go there will be trouble, if I stay it will be double," came the verse in the song. Mike knew without a doubt that it was Will, but how could it be?

He snatched the *Supercomm* and transmitted, "Will is that you? It's Mike! Do you copy? Over." He released the button, but heard nothing but static. "Will are you there? Will!"

Again, nothing but static answered. Mike peered back at Eleven and her bleeding nose. She closed her eyes looking sad. He lowered the radio and asked her, "Was that...was it...?"

Looking at him with a small smile, Eleven answered, "Will."

---

Joyce slumped back on her living room couch, the ax across her legs, when Will called for her.

"Mom..."

She woke and looked around confused. She could have sworn she had heard someone. She sighed, it must have been a dream or maybe she was hearing things, and she turned back to face forward, and suddenly Will was in front of her, and he shouted, "Mom!"

With a gasp, Joyce woke for real this time, to see Jonathan trying to arouse her, "Mom! Wake up."

"What? What time is it?" Joyce asked groggily.

"It's almost eight. We have to go," he responded.

She could not seem to get her mind to work properly. "Go where? Where?"

A shadow cast over his face.

"To see Will," he answered.

---

Karen knocked on Michael's bedroom door and called, "Michael..."

She entered cautiously and found him lying in bed with the covers pulled up to his chin. She walked over to sit on the edge of the mattress as she said, "Hi, honey. How are you feeling?"

"I uh...I don't think I can go to school today."

"Oh, that's fine, sweetie. I need to drop off Nance, then I'm gonna check in on Barb's parents. Why don't you grab a book or something and come with me?" she said tenderly. "We can stop by the video store on the way back, pick out whatever you want. Even R-rated."

But what Mike needed was her out of the house for a good chunk of time, so he said, "I think I just want to stay home today. I mean, if that's okay?"

"Well, are you sure you're gonna be all right here by yourself?"

"I think so."

"Okay. But if you need anything, call dad at work," she told him.

"Okay."

Karen smiled and said, "Okay."

She pressed a kiss to his forehead and turned to leave, and Mike called innocently to her back, "Bye."

"Bye, sweetie," she said as she pulled the door closed behind her.

As soon as the door was closed Mike threw aside his covers and grabbed the radio from his bedside table. "Lucas, do you copy?"

In his room, Lucas laid back on his pillows and ignored the radio sitting on the bedside table.

"Lucas, come on, I know you're there! This is urgent. I'm serious!" Standing Mike said, determinedly, "I'm not gonna stop until you answer. Lucas. Lucas! Lucas-Lucas-Lucas-Lucas-Lucas-Lucas..."

Lucas rolled over and snatched up his radio, raised the antenna and interrupted the tirade, "Go away, Mike. I'm not in the mood, all right? Over and out."

He went to shove the antenna back in, but Mike answered, "No, not 'out'. I'm not messing around, okay? This is about Will. Over."

"What about Will?" asked Lucas. "You mean about his funeral? Over."

"No, not his funeral. Screw his funeral!" said Mike.

Appalled, Lucas said, "What?"

"Just get over here stat! And bring Dustin. Over and out."

---

At the Roane County coroner's office, Hopper waited in the lobby. He turned to the woman behind the desk and asked, "What's taking so long?"

"Well, everything's been a bit chaotic around here without Gary," she admitted.

"Without Gary?" Hopper asked, nonplussed. "Where's Gary?"

Now was her turned to be confused.

"Well, I thought you knew. Those men from state, they...they sent Gary home last night."

"So who did the autopsy?" asked Hopper in alarm.

"Someone from state."

Hopper looked away confused and suspicious. Since when did a kid

drowning require someone from state to do the autopsy. Nothing in this town was going the way it should.

Through a window in the morgue Joyce and Jonathan stared apprehensively at a cold, steel exam table upon which a body lay covered by a thin sheet. Jonathan looked to his mother and then back to the body. The coroner standing in the room leaned forward and pulled the sheet back revealing the head and torso of Will's lifeless body. A jolt went through Jonathan as if he had stuck his hand in a socket, and bile rose in his throat. He gagged and coughed before turning away and he left his mother standing there.

Joyce only stared dumbfounded. It certainly looked like him, and fear and revulsion pulsed through her. But she also knew what she had seen yesterday, and Will had told her he was alive. She spoke to the coroner, "He has a birthmark on his right arm. Can you show that to me, please?"

In the lobby, Jonathan sat quietly beside Hopper separated by one chair. Hopper asked him, "How's your mom doing?"

"I don't know," answered Jonathan honestly.

"How long's this stuff been going on? With the lights and uh...Will and the thing in the wall?"

"Since the first phone call, I guess. You know, she's had anxiety problems...in the past. But this...I don't know. I'm worried it could be...ugh, I don't know," he bowed his head, feeling tired on so many levels, but he glanced back up at Hopper and said, "She'll be okay. We'll be okay. My mom...she's tough."

"Yeah, she is," Hopper reached over and placed his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "Hey. She is."

Jonathan smiled at Hopper feeling a little less alone, and Hopper smiled back. The doors to the morgue burst open.

"Ma'am! Ma'am, I need you to sign!" yelled the coroner.

"I don't...I don't know what you think that thing is in there, but that is not my son!" Joyce shouted back.

"Joyce, wait a second," said Hopper getting up from his chair.

"No," she said warningly and she stormed from the office.

"Mom!" called Jonathan.

"Ma'am I...ma'am!" yelled the coroner again, and Jonathan ran out of the office after his mother.

---

The school bell rang as Steve and Nancy spoke in the tunnel leading to the football field. Football players ran onto the field for practice.

"So, wait a sec. I don't understand. You went back to my house?" asked Steve, confused.

"To look for Barb," she nodded.

"Yeah, okay, but why didn't you just talk to me? That's crazy," said Steve.

"I don't know, I...I was scared," she responded.

"You seriously think you saw a guy in a mask just hanging out in my yard?" Steve questioned her skeptically.

"I don't think it was a mask."

"But he had no face?"

"I don't know! I don't know, I just...I have a terrible feeling about this." Why were people so concerned about what she may or may not have seen when the more pressing matter was that Barb was missing.

'Oh, this is bad. This is really bad," Steve said leaning back against the wall behind him.

Nancy stepped forward. Finally, someone who got it. "What?"

"The cops...they're gonna want to talk to all of us now. Tommy, Carol, everybody who was at the party," Steve said annoyed.

Disappointment flooded her. "So?"

"My parents are gonna murder me!" Steve griped.

Disappointment was quickly replaced with flaming anger. "Are you serious right now?"

Steve looked at her, wide-eyed. "You don't understand. My dad's a grade-A asshole."

"Barb is missing! And you're worried about your dad?"

"Okay, just...when you talk to the cops, just...don't mention the beers," he said stepping toward her. "It's just gonna get us both in trouble, and Barbara's got nothing to do with it, okay?"

Nancy scoffed, and she felt she was seeing Steve Harrington clearly for the first time. "I can't believe you right now. I can't believe you."

She stalked away furious, and Steve called after her, "Nancy. Nancy, wait! Nancy!"

---

Joyce walked quickly down the sidewalk in town as Jonathan pulled curbside on the road in her car and said, "Mom, will you get in?"

"No, I-I-I-I need to think. Just go on home," she answered.

"Mom, will you just get in, please?" But she waved her hand and continued walking, so he pulled over and throwing the car in park he got out of the car and chased after her as she crossed the intersection. " Mom. Mom! Mom! Stop!"

Joyce turned and told him, "Just go home, Jonathan."

"No, this is not an okay time for you to shut down," he told her.

Offended, Joyce repeated, "Shut down? What..."

"We have to deal with this, Mom! We have to deal with the funeral!" he could not help feel angry at her even though he knew she was hurting, too.

Joyce scoffed, "The funeral? For...for who? For that thing back

there?"

"Okay, let me get this straight," Jonathan felt he would go crazy trying to get her to see reason. "Will, that's not his body, because he's in the lights, right? And there's a monster in the wall? Do you even hear yourself?"

"I know it sounds crazy!" shouted Joyce as passersby paused to watch the scene, but she took no notice. "I-I-I sound crazy."

"Yeah," Jonathan confirmed.

"You think I don't know that? It is crazy! But I heard him, Jonathan. He talked to me! Will is...is calling to me! And he's out there, and he's alone, and he's scared, and I...I don't...I don't care if anyone believes me! I am not gonna stop looking for him until I find him and bring him home. I am going to bring him home!" she declared.

Crying tears of grief and fury, Jonathan yelled back as she walked away, "Yeah, well, while you're talking to the lights, the rest of us are having a funeral for Will! I'm not letting him sit in that freezer another day!"

He panted as if he'd just been running and glanced over at the people staring and whispering among themselves. Had they no decency?

"All right, show's over," he told them as he walked back to his mother's car. When they kept staring he yelled, "What?"

---

As Eleven sat in her den fiddling with the radio again, Mike, Lucas, and Dustin all sat listening to the static, although sounds of what they decided were whimpering seemed to mix with it.

"We keep losing the signal, but you heard it, right?" Mike asked the others.

"Yeah, I heard a baby," said Lucas.

"What?" asked Mike.

"Mike, you obviously tapped into a baby monitor. It's probably the



Blackburns' next door," Lucas told him.

"Uh, did that sound like a baby to you? That was Will!" said Mike confidently.

But ever cynical, Lucas complained, "Mike..."

"Lucas, you don't understand. He spoke last night. Words! He was singing that weird song he loves," Mike explained, and Dustin glanced down thoughtful. "Even El heard him!"

"Oh, well, if the weirdo heard him, then I guess-," began Lucas sarcastically, but Dustin interrupted him.

"Are you sure you're on the right channel?"

"I don't think it's about that," Mike answered slowly. "I think, somehow, she's channeling him."

"Like...like Professor X," pointed out Dustin.

"Yeah," said Mike.

"Are you actually believing this crap?" Lucas asked Dustin.

"I don't know, I mean..." Dustin responded cautiously, not entirely sure himself. "Do you remember when Will fell off his bike and broke his finger? He sounded a lot like that."

"Did you guys not see what I saw?" Lucas asked them wildly. "They pulled Will's body out of the water. He's dead!"

"Well, maybe it's his ghost. Maybe he's haunting us," Dustin suggested.

"It's not his ghost," replied Mike.

"So how do you know that?" Lucas questioned, annoyed.

"I just do!"

"Then what was in that water?"

"I don't know!. All I know is Will is alive. Will is alive! He's out there somewhere. All we have to do is find him."

The static crackled again. He couldn't even hear the whimpering anymore.

"This isn't gonna work," said Mike. "We need to get El to a stronger radio."

"Mr. Clarke's Heathkit ham shack," Dustin said, perking up.

Mike nodded. "Yeah."

"The Heathkit's at school," Lucas reminded them. "There is no way we're gonna get the weirdo in there without anyone noticing. I mean...look at her."

He gestured at Eleven and both Dustin and Mike turned to stare at her. She glanced uncertainly from one to the other then at Lucas feeling uncomfortable.

In Nancy's room Eleven sat on a pretty ottoman bench as Mike opened a box of his sister's make-up. He pulled out what he believed was the blush, and a brush to apply it. Mike swiped the powdered substance over Eleven's cheek and she flinched as the soft bristles tickled her cheek bone. Concentrating hard, and remembering how Nancy had once done this to him, he gently smeared pink lipstick onto Eleven's lips. He examined his work, and nodded, satisfied.

In the garage Lucas and Dustin searched through the Wheeler's storage, sifting through costumes and old clothing. Lucas pulled out an old pink dress that once belonged to Nancy while Dustin pulled out a blond wig from one of the cardboard boxes. Lucas held the dress against him and glanced at Dustin for his approval as Dustin, who now wore the wig over his curly brown hair, held the strands from his face and gave Lucas a questioning stare.

Several minutes later the boys talked over their plans outside of the bedrooms as they waited for Eleven to get dressed. The door to Nancy's room opened and Eleven came out wearing the wig over her shaved head and Nancy's old pink dress. The boys all stared,

astonished, at the results of their work.

"Wow," said Dustin. "She looks..."

"Pretty," finished Mike. Lucas shot a strange look at the back of his head as Eleven's mouth twitched in a small smile. A huge teasing grin spread across Dustin's face, and Mike, realizing what he had said, quickly added, "Good. You look pretty good."

Slowly, Eleven walked past them to stand before the mirror hanging on the landing wall. Mike followed her as Lucas and Dustin stared after them. Examining the blond hair, pink lips and dress, Eleven whispered, "Pretty. Good."

---

At Hawkins lab the doors to the elevator underground opened and three men wearing hazmat suits exited the shaft. Although the middle man did not carry a flashlight the other two did. His suit was different as well. Mustard yellow as compared to the white suits of his companions he wore an army green harness strapped over his torso, and his helmet was lit with a built-in light. They reached the room containing the strange rift in the wall and the men already present wasted no time in hooking a cable onto the ring on the back of his harness.

The man turned, and one of the scientists who had hooked him to the cable said, "Clear."

He held up his thumb in acknowledgement and looked back at the rift ready to do what he came to do. But then he remembered his peers in the control room and looked back at them on the raised platform, separated by thick glass.

"You boys hear me alright in there?" he asked via the intercom in his suit.

Speaking into a microphone the man sitting at the control panel answered, "Loud and clear, Shepard."

Brenner who was standing just behind the control panel, transmitted, "Good luck in there, son."

Reassured, Shepard faced forward and listened to the low grumbling coming from the vines and webbing. He walked forward and the cable clicked as it unrolled from the large coil drilled to the floor. When he stood right before the rift he ran his gloved hand across the strange substance. He could tell it was slimy and sticky but it was also much tougher than he had anticipated. Shepard then stuck his hand into the substance and it seemed as if it was pulling at him. He felt nothing on the other side. Just an empty, cold cavity. He quickly pulled his hand back and looked back at Brenner, uncertain, but Brenner gave him a small nod. Determined, Shepard turned back to the rift and slowly forced his way through the mucous lining in the wall, Brenner and his men watching as he disappeared within. After he had crossed, the substance seemed to grow back, repairing itself.

---

"The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress. And Kurtz's life was running swiftly, too-"

"Nancy Wheeler?" a woman leaned into an English class where the teacher had been reading to his students. Nancy turned away from the window she'd been staring out of, lost in thoughts, and stared back at the woman.

"If you'll come with me, please?"

Nancy quickly gathered her things as her fellow students watched. Not long after she sat in the school cafeteria beside her mother and across from Officers Powell and Callahan having recounted the events from the other night.

"This argument you and Barbara had? What exactly was it about?" Powell asked.

Nancy frowned trying to explain it so that they could understand. "It wasn't really an argument. Barb just wanted to leave. I didn't, so...I told her to just go home."

"Then what?" Powell continued.

Very conscious of her mother sitting next to her, Nancy answered,

"Then I went upstairs to put on some dry clothes."

"And the next day, you went back and...saw a bear, you're thinking?" asked Powell. Nancy could tell he thought it sounded crazy.

"I don't know what it was," she said. "But...I think...I think maybe it took Barb. You need to check behind Steve's house-"

"We did," interrupted Callahan shaking his head. "There's nothing there. There's no sign of a bear."

"And no car," added Powell.

Nancy snapped her eyes back on Powell, and asked incredulously, "What?"

"Look," said Callahan. "We figured that Barbara came back last night and then she took off, went somewhere else."

"Has she ever talked to you about running off? Leaving town, maybe?" Powell asked her.

Nancy shook her head. Their minds were not where she needed them to be. "No. No, Barb wouldn't do that, ever."

"She wasn't maybe upset about the fact that you were spending time with this boy? Uh, Steve Harrington?" he insinuated as Karen watched her daughter closely.

"What? No!" said Nancy beginning to feel flustered.

"Maybe she was jealous because she saw you go up to Steve's room?" suggested Callahan.

"It wasn't like that," she said fiercely. The interview had quickly spun out of control and she wanted them back on the matter at hand. Barb's disappearance.

"Like what?" asked Callahan.

"Steve and me, we're...we're just friends. We...we just talked," she half glanced at her mother.

Then, Callahan asked her, "Now was this before or after you changed out of your clothes?"

Nancy leaned back in her chair, defeated and angry because no one seemed worried that Barbara Holland was missing.

---

Hopper sat beside an older man in the police station as he said, "So, Gary, tell me about these troopers that brought in Will."

"It was about six of 'em, I'd say," answered Gary.

"They're all states?" asked Hopper.

"Yes, sir," Gary confirmed. "Never seen that many troopers come with a body before."

"They told you that they were gonna take care of the autopsy, huh?"

Yeah. Claimed jurisdiction. Kicked me out," Gary shrugged. "Well, it all seemed a bit over the top to me, considering..."

Hopper needled him as Gary hesitated, "Considering what?"

"Considering this was Will Byers and not John F. Kennedy," finished Gary. Just then Hopper caught something from the small television playing overhead as he mulled over what Gary had said.

Distracted, he stood staring at the screen, and told Gary, "Thanks for stopping by, Gary."

"Sure thing."

As Gary left the station Hopper turned up the volume on the television as a man said, "...let the people know that, uh, the troopers are on duty and you should be safe, because we think this is just an isolated incident."

"State trooper David O'Bannon, thank you so much for your help," a reporter thanked O'Bannon.

"Thank you, sir," said the state trooper.

---

While Mike, Dustin, and Lucas rode their bikes down the road leading to the junior high school Eleven held onto Mike staring around at the town and the people going about their business. After securing their bikes in a bike rack in front of the school, the boys and Eleven entered the building.

Walking through the halls to the AV club room Mike commanded the others, "Okay, remember, if anyone sees us look sad."

Over the PA system a man announced, "Attention students, there will be an assembly to honor Will Byers in the gymnasium now. Do not go to fourth period."

Reaching their destination, Mike attempted to open the door but found it locked. He turned back frustrated, "It's locked."

"What?" Lucas asked appalled and he too attempted to open it.

"Hey, do you think you can open it?" Dustin looked expectantly at Eleven. "With your powers?"

"Boys?" Mike, Lucas, Dustin and Eleven all jumped back startled as they spun around to face Mr. Clarke, who had just appeared from around the corner.

"Hey," said Lucas from his spot pressed up against the AV door.

"Assembly's about to start," Mr. Clarke informed them.

Feigning a look of devastation Mike said, "We know. We're just, you know..."

"Upset," said Lucas smiling, then remembering he had to look sad he transformed his features into one of despair.

"Y-yeah definitely upset," said Dustin looking lost.

"We need some alone time," explained Mike.

"To cry," added Dustin.

"Yeah, listen...I get it, I do," Mr. Clarke said. "I know how hard this is, but let's just be there for Will, huh?"

Dustin nodded with the most solemn look.

"And then..." Mr. Clarke continued pulling out a set of keys from his pocket and tossing them to Mike who caught them surprised. "The Heathkit is all yours for the rest of the day. What do you say?"

The boys all grinned at one another and Dustin turned smiling at Mr. Clarke. They could always count on him to help them out without question.

Suddenly, Mr. Clarke took notice of the quiet girl in their mist. He had never seen a girl hanging out with these boys before. He addressed her politely, "I don't believe we've met. What's your name?"

Taken aback at having an adult address her Eleven looked to the others uncomfortably before saying very quietly, "Elev-"

"Eleanor!" Mike shouted, drowning out her voice. "She's my, uh-"

"Cousin!" inserted Lucas quickly.

"Second cousin," Dustin tacked on for good measure, holding up two fingers.

Mike sighed and said, "She's here for Will's funeral."

Mr. Clarke turned to Eleven. "Ah, well, welcome to Hawkins Middle, Eleanor. I wish you were here under better circumstances."

Eleven stared around at the boys nervously but as they didn't intervene she answered simply, "Thank you."

Mr. Clarke frowned, "Uh, where are you from exactly?"

The boys all peered around at one another realizing they never discussed a backstory for El if someone came across them. Eleven answered, "Bad place."

"Sweden!" interjected Dustin wildly.



"I have a lot of Swedish family," said Mike.

"She hates it there," Dustin said.

"Cold!" explained Lucas.

"Subzero," Dustin confirmed.

Bemused, Mr. Clarke gestured down the hall. "Shall we?"

Lucas nodded. "Yep!"

They all turned and headed toward the gymnasium.

In the gym, Principal Coleman spoke to the students solemnly. "At times like these it is important that we come together as a community..."

The gymnasium doors opened with a bang and Dustin stood in the entrance with Mike, Lucas, Eleven, and Mr. Clarke in his wake. The principal fell silent as he, the faculty seated in chairs on either side of his podium, and the entire student population presently seated on the bleachers turned to stare at them.

"Abort," Dustin whispered roughly as he took notice of all the eyes on him and he tried to turn away, but Lucas grabbed hold of him and forced him into the gym. They each took a seat on the bleachers as the principal continued his speech.

"We come together to heal...we come together to grieve..."

---

Nancy stormed into her family's house her mother following close behind.

"You lied to the police!" yelled Karen.

"I didn't lie!" Nancy shouted back as she made a beeline for the stairs.

Karen threw her purse onto the kitchen counter and followed her daughter asking furiously, "How naive do you think I am? You and Steve were just talking?"

Spinning around Nancy screamed back, "We slept together! Is that what you want to know? It doesn't matter!"

"It does matter!" Karen yelled.

"No! It is all bullshit!" Nancy stomped back to her mother, crying and shouting into her face. "It has nothing to do with Barb and she's missing! And something terrible happened to her! I know it! I know it! And no one is listening to me!"

She attempted to flee again but Karen caught hold of her saying, "Sweetie, sweetie, I'm listening. I'm listening to you-!"

"No! You're not!" cried Nancy and she pulled away from her mother's clutch.

Karen called after her, "Nancy...Nancy!"

"Just leave me alone!" she yelled back down the stairs.

Karen sighed closing her eyes. She felt like somehow she had looked away only to look back and find that she had lost her daughter.

Upstairs Nancy slammed her door and shoved her books onto the desk by the entrance. She flung her bag and herself onto the bed. Her eyes stung with tears as she sat crying and thinking about Barb. She wanted to see her right now so badly, and all she could think about was Barb leaving Steve's house alone that night after she had told her to go without her. But then she suddenly remembered Jonathan's ripped photo of Barb sitting on the diving board and she quickly pulled it out of her bag.

Nancy gazed down at the photo sadly. Had Barb decided to wait for Nancy? To make sure she got home safely? In the photo she looked so sad and lonely, and Nancy began to cry in earnest at the thought of Barb waiting there, because of her. She would be home safe if she hadn't been forced to go to a party she didn't want to go to in the first place. Nancy set the image down on her bed covers but then she noticed another that had slipped out of her bag as well. Holding the two pieces together she realized it matched the one of Barb. Pulling out the other torn pieces of the photo she began moving them around

piecing them together like a puzzle. After she had arranged them in the correct order, she got out some scotch tape and used it to tape them back into one photo so that she had the full image of Barb sitting alone on the diving board. Except she noticed there was some form of a shadow or person or something standing close behind her, and she thought the shape looked similar to what she had seen behind Steve's house.

---

Devices beeped in the control room at Hawkins lab where Dr. Brenner peered down in his hazmat suit at the man sitting before the panel. "Try him again."

The man pressed a button on the panel and transmitted, "Shepard, come in. Confirm comm."

They heard nothing but static. "Shepard, come in. Confirm comm."

Shepard's voice came over the radio distorted but understandable. "This is Shepard. Confirming, over."

Brenner looked up, excited, "Shepard. Where are you? Can you describe to us what it is you see? Over."

"It's low visibility. I'm about one click south of the rift. Everything's still here, but it's all eroded. Covered in blood..." As Brenner listened a strange growling came over the radio and Shepard cut out.

Brenner pressed the switch to communicate with their man. "Shepard? Do you copy? Shepard? Can you hear me?"

Shepard's panicked breathing came over the intercom and he said, "There's something else...there's something else in here!"

What sounded like an animal growling came over the radio and sirens began to blare as the lights went out to be replaced with flashing red alarms.

"Reel him in," commanded Brenner, and when the man sitting beside him didn't move he turned and bellowed at him, "Reel him back in!"

"Get him in," the man called through the intercom to the men on the

lower level.

The men waiting in front of the rift began rolling the coil of cable back to pull Shepard out of the unknown environment. One of the men shouted, "Come on, come on! Faster!"

"There's something else in here!" came Shepard's hysterical voice. "Pull me out! Pull me out, pull me out! Pull me out! Pull me out!"

But the growling masked his yells, and the cable attached to Shepard jerked in all directions as the men shouted instructions to each other trying to reel the unstable cord back in. Brenner watched through the window waiting for something to happen, when abruptly, the cable went slack, and he stepped back knowing it no longer mattered.

The man sitting at the control panel transmitted, "Shepard, come in. Over."

"Comms are down, sir," said a man on the lower level.

"Shepard, come in! Over," he called again anyhow.

Brenner watched as the cable reeled in faster than it should, and through the strange membrane, the bloody remains of a human pelvis fell to the floor of their lab not a scrap of flesh or muscle left. The cable dragged the bone across the floor leaving a thick streak of blood behind it. Brenner stared down at his feet and realized that what they were dealing with was indeed catastrophic and would be damaging to his lab and livelihood if not contained. The rift in the wall growled as it grew back together repairing the damage the cable had done.

---

Principal Coleman continued with his speech. "Will Byers' death is an unimaginable tragedy. Will was an exceptional student and a wonderful friend to all of us. It's impossible to express the hole his loss will leave in our community. I'd like to introduce you to Sandy Sloane. She's a local grief counselor from the church over in Jonesboro, but before she comes up here, I just want those of you who are having trouble dealing with this tragic loss..."

Mike peered around at all the faces of the students sitting around him. Eleven also stared at them, never having seen so many kids all gathered in one place. As she looked around she caught Dustin's eye and he grinned at her.

Mike whispered to Lucas, "Look at these fakers."

Glancing around too, Lucas said, "They probably didn't even know his name till today."

From a few feet away Troy and James snickered catching Lucas', Mike's, Dustin's, and Eleven's attention.

"What?" Troy whispered to James. "Who is interested in this? This is so stupid. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

James laughed in response.

"Oh, he was such a great student," Troy pretended to cry. "Oh, he's going to leave a hole in the community."

Eleven, who had leaned forward to see Troy past Mike, said, "Mouth-breather."

Mike looked back around at Eleven, who stared back momentarily, before sitting back in her seat. Once the school bell rang and the students stood to leave, Mike followed Troy and James closely, before calling out, "Hey. Hey! Hey, Troy! Hey, Troy! You...you think this is funny?"

Troy, who had turned around, asked threateningly, "What'd you say, Wheeler?"

"I-I saw you guys laughing over there. And I think that's a real messed up thing to do," he said trembling with anger and adrenaline.

"Didn't you listen to the counselor, Wheeler?" said James. "Grief shows itself in funny ways."

"Besides, what's there to be sad about, anyway?" added Troy. "Will's in fairyland now, right? Flying around with all the other little fairies. All happy and gay!" He and James laughed and Troy imitated a fairy.

They turned to stalk away. Mike stared numbly after them as Eleven watched him. Then, letting all the fury he held against Troy bubble to the surface, Mike walked forward and shoved Troy's back as hard as he could, so that Troy fell to the floor and the students all walking past gasped in shock. Dustin and Lucas also exclaimed, stunned. Troy looked back at Mike from the floor.

"You're dead, Wheeler! Dead!" Troy hopped up and charged at Mike. However, in that quick movement something strange happened. He had frozen mid-charge. His arm was raised up and his feet stood apart, knees slightly bent as if he was about to take off running. Dustin, Lucas, and Mike all stared bewildered and Troy's eyes moved in his head as he peered at the confused students, frightened at his sudden paralysis.

Then, a dark stain began to form on the khaki pants Troy wore, starting at the groin and spreading down his leg.

A student laughed and pointed. "Dude, Troy peed himself."

The students, Lucas, and Dustin all laughed, amazed at the sudden turn of events.

"Holy shit," muttered Dustin. But Mike turned to look back at Eleven who gave him a small smile before quickly wiping her nose and turning away. Mike turned back toward Troy grinning.

"Hey!" called Principal Coleman, "What's going on here?"

The students all turned and quickly dispersed as Lucas ran up to Mike.

"Mike! Let's go!"

They and Dustin hurried with Eleven out of the gym leaving Troy standing in his puddle of urine. The students all walked around him, giving him a wide berth, even James abandoned him, so that Troy stood there, with restored movement, alone in his soiled pants, humiliated and clueless over what to do.

---

Jonathan examined a coffin numbly as the funeral arranger presented

the wooden box in a soft, delicate voice.

"It's made of soft wood with a crepe interior. Uh, now, I...I don't know what your budget is, but over here, we...we have copper and bronze."

Jonathan sighed as he followed the man to look at the coffins he knew they'd never be able to afford, but of which would never amount to the value Will was to him. But looking over at the entrance he spotted Nancy.

"Can you just give me a second?" he asked the funeral arranger.

"Of course," the man said.

Jonathan approached Nancy. "Hey."

"Hey," she responded nervously. "Your mom, um...she said you'd be here. I just...Can we talk for a second?"

Outside in the hall of the funeral home they sat side by side on a bench as Jonathan peered at the photo he had taken of Barb.

"It looks like it could be some kind of perspective distortion, but I wasn't using the wide angle. I don't know," he shook his head uncertain and returned the photo. "It's weird."

"And you're sure you didn't see anyone else out there?" Nancy asked again.

"No," he replied. "And she was there one second and then, um...gone. I figured she bolted."

Nancy stared down at the picture. "The cops think that she ran away. But they don't know Barb. And I went back to Steve's...and I thought I...saw something. Some...weird man or...I don't know what it was..."

She slumped, tired, and peered up at Jonathan who watched her with consternation as he thought about what his mother had said about the monster that came out of the wall. That it looked almost human but wasn't.

Nancy suddenly remembered why Jonathan was here in a funeral home.

"i'm sorry. I...I shouldn't have come here today. I'm..." She quickly gathered her things and stood to leave. "i'm so sorry."

After she had taken a few paces away Jonathan called after her, "What'd he look like?"

"What?" she asked turning back.

"This man you saw in the woods. What'd he look like?"

Nancy struggled to explain to him what she had barely glimpsed. "I don't...I don't know. It was almost like he...he didn't have..."

"Didn't have a face?" Jonathan finished.

Instantly alarmed, Nancy asked, "How did you know that?"

---

Across town in a bar named 'Hideaway' a handful of men shot pool while others sat at the bar and watched the game on the television overhead.

"Aw, come on!" said a man sitting on a stool, and he slapped the counter top in frustrated as he watched the screen. Beside him Hopper drained his beer in one gulp.

"Another, please," Hopper told the bartender. Then he indicated the man beside him. "And another for my uh, friend here."

"Oh, thanks, man," he said, surprised. "Appreciate it."

Hopper tapped his cigarette on the ashtray. "Yeah, that's all right. I'm, uh, I'm celebrating. My daughter, she won the spelling bee today."

"Is that right?" asked the man.

"Yeah, that's right," smiled Hopper. "'Odontalgia.' That was the word. You know what it means?"



The man shook his head.

"It's a fancy name for a toothache," Hopper chuckled again. "Yeah, she's smart. She's real smart. Don't know where she gets it from. I've been tryin' to figure that out for years."

"Your daughter, she got a name?"

Hopper looked at the man through the cigarette smoke, "What?"

"Your daughter? What's her name?"

"Sarah," answered Hopper. "Her name's Sarah."

The man held up his fresh beer, and cheered, "To Sarah."

Hopper clinked his glass to the bottle and they drank to Sarah. He set his glass down and squinted back at the man. "I recognize you. You famous or somethin'?"

He shrugged. "Uh, you might have seen me on TV. I, uh...I found that Byers boy."

"So, you on that case or what?"

"I just saw him on patrol, you know? Dumb luck."

"So that quarry," asked Hopper carefully. "That's uh...that's state-run, where they found the boy, huh?"

O'Bannon nodded. "Yeah."

Hopper chuckled. "Yeah, well, that's funny. 'Cause, you know, I know for a fact that it's run by the Sattler company. Frank Sattler? Decent guy, still got a couple operational quarries up in Roane."

"Is that right?" O'Bannon asked.

"Yeah," Hopper stared straight at him. "That's right. So why are you lying to me, man?"

O'Bannon frowned at Hopper. "What's your problem, bud?"

"I don't have a problem," said Hopper. "I'm just a concerned citizen."

"Yeah? Well, stick your nose someplace else. The kid is dead. End of story," O'Bannon stood and slapped some cash onto the counter. "Thanks for ruining the game, dick."

Hopper downed the rest of his beer as the man left the bar. Several minutes later he was sinking his fist across O'Bannon's face and then into his stomach. Hopper punched his face again as he doubled up, then held him to the wall by the front of his shirt.

"Okay...Let's try this one more time. Who told you to be out there?" Hopper shouted at him. "What were you doing out there?"

When O'Bannon didn't respond Hopper drew his fist back ready to punch him again, but O'Bannon cowered.

"I don't know! I don't know," he cried holding up his hands. "They...they just told me to call it in and not let anybody get too close."

"Get close to what?" asked Hopper.

"The body," said O'Bannon.

"Who do you work for? The NSA? Hawkins lab?" O'Bannon's eyes had fixed on something behind him and Hopper turned to see someone peering back at them from a black car. "Who is that?"

The engine started and O'Bannon said, "You're gonna get us both killed."

"Who is that? Hey!" Hopper shoved O'Bannon aside and ran across the grass toward the car, pulling out his gun as he did. "Hey!"

The tires screeched as it sped away and behind him O'Bannon fled. Hopper aimed his gun at the retreating vehicle but realized he didn't have a good shot. He quickly spun back toward the building to interrogate O'Bannon further, but he was gone.

---

Joyce, who had carried Will's stereo out into the living room, pressed

play and the song "Should I Stay or Should I go?" began blaring from the speakers.

"Come on! Come on!" she shouted at the walls as she paced around her living room. "Talk to me! I know you're here!"

She touched the dangling Christmas lights waiting for one to light up.

---

Lights flickered on in the AV club room.

"Come on," said Mike as he led Eleven to the Heathkit radio and she sat before it.

"Now what?" asked Dustin glancing at Lucas and Mike.

"She'll find him. Right El?" Mike said and he switched on the radio so that they could hear the interference between the frequencies. Eleven closed her eyes seeing images of the past.

---

*Eleven sat curled on a cold, hard metal chair, her thin arms wrapped around her legs which were drawn close to her chest. Electrodes over her head. She sat beside a table with nothing on it but a photo of a man, which she avoided looking at. Behind her, Papa poured water into a glass.*

*"Eleven? Are you listening?" he asked as he set the glass of water next to the photo, and then he sat in a chair beside her. "That man before you...I need you to find him."*

*"Hurt him?" asked Eleven.*

*"No. No, I don't want you to hurt him," he slid the image closer to her. "I want you to listen to him."*

*"Listen?" she asked.*

*"Yes. I want you to listen to what he says and repeat his words back to me. Just like we used to with those old nursery rhymes," He placed his hand over one of hers and she looked up at him. "Do you remember? Hmm? Do you think you could do that for me?"*

*She missed the days of the old nursery rhymes. When using her powers had been like a game that just tired her out a little, but she nodded, and he said, "Good."*

*He helped her lean forward and she put her legs down in front of her as she peered at the man in the picture. Closing her eyes she felt down the hall, searching for the man. Eventually she found him in a room speaking in a monotone, random words that held little meaning to her.*

*"Begin', 'amulet', 'frigid', 'evolve', 'airplane'."*

*Brenner watched the girl carefully, but when she didn't say anything he said, "Eleven? Repeat the words."*

*But instead the lights in the room shut off and the man's voice emitted over the PA speaker.*

*"Apricot', 'peninsula', 'game', 'enchantment', 'mouse', 'balloon'."*

---

As the boys watched Eleven sitting before the radio, her eyes closed and Mike said amazed, "She's doing it. She's finding him."

"This is crazy," conceded Dustin.

"Calm down. She just closed her eyes," stated Lucas. Abruptly the lights above their heads flickered off and the boys gasped in alarm.

"Holy..." began Dustin, but then a loud clanging came over the radio, and they bent closer to listen. "What is that?"

---

The music continued to blast throughout her house as Joyce watched the lights closely, but then she heard a loud clanging noise coming from the wall. She quickly shut off the music. She neared the wall trying to identify the sound, when she suddenly heard the unmistakable whimpers of a child.

"Mom?" called Will.

Joyce gasped. "Will?"

"Mom?" Will called again.

"Will!" Joyce cried running her hands over the wall. Was he on the other side? She dashed outdoors searching for him. ("Will!") but her son was nowhere to be seen and she gaped in bewilderment before hurrying back inside to the wall. "Will!"

---

The boys huddled around the radio as they listened to Will calling.

"Mom?"

"No way!" exclaimed Lucas as Dustin and Mike looked at one another amazed. Eleven still sat extremely still with her eyes closed, taking no notice of the boys.

"Mom!" Will shouted.

---

"Will, I'm here! I'm here!" she yelled as she patted the wall trying to get to him. How was he inside the wall? She found the edge of the wallpaper and began to rip it down. As she pulled the paper away and yanked out the inner lining she found some form of a translucent pink wall within.

"Baby..." she called, and she saw a figure moving behind it.

"Mom!" Will yelled, and she knew the figure in the wall was her boy.

"Oh, God, Will!" she screamed.

---

"Mom!" yelled Will.

All at once the boys began shouting through the radio, trying to reach their friend.

"Will! Will!"

"Will!" hollered Lucas into the microphone. "It's us, are you there?"

"Can you hear us?" asked Dustin. "We're here!"

"Hello? Mom?" called Will.

"Why can't he hear us?" Lucas asked Mike wildly.

But Mike was at a loss as he answered, "I don't know!"

And all the while Eleven's eyes remained shut as she focused on Will.

---

"Oh, thank God! Baby...Will!" she sobbed. She suddenly registered a low growling from within the wall.

"Mom...Mom, it's coming!" shouted Will fearfully.

"Tell me where you are!" she screamed desperately. "How do I get to you?"

"It's like home, but it's so dark," he answered.

---

"It's so dark and empty, and it's cold!" Will yelled from wherever he was and the boys gave each other horrified stares. In their midst, Eleven's eyes were still closed and her nose was now bleeding.

---

Will called out for Joyce, "Mom! Mom!"

As much as it pained her to turn him away Joyce hollered back through the barrier. "Listen to me! I swear I'm gonna get to you, okay? But right now, I need you to hide!"

"Mom, please!" Will pleaded through the strange wall.

"No, no listen! Listen, I..." she could hear the growling becoming louder. She knew he had little time to get out of there. "I will find you, but you have to run now! Run! Run!"

The concrete that should have been present when she first pulled out the inner lining of the wall seemed to be growing back over the translucent barrier blocking Joyce from her son.

---

In the AV room sparks flew as the radio fuses burst into flames. The boys yelped in fright and within seconds a fire alarm went off. Dustin dashed to the corner and pulled out a fire extinguisher. Pulling the pin, he aimed the nozzle at the radio and squeezed the handle, sweeping back and forth over the base of the flames. In seconds he had put out the fire.

As the fire bells rang Mike hurried to Eleven, spinning her chair so that she faced him.

"El," he said in alarm. "El, you okay?"

"Oh!" gasped Lucas as he took one look at her. She was slumped weakly in the chair, blood pouring from her nose, a sheen of sweat covered her face, her skin cool and pale. She looked gravely ill.

"Can you move?" asked Mike, but she could only stare vaguely back. "Here, help her up."

He and Lucas each grabbed one of her arms and they heaved her to her feet.

---

Joyce snatched up her ax from the floor and in a rage she began hacking at the wall, bellowing in grief and fury. She grunted as she chopped at the wall and she put all her fear and frustration, her anguish of not having her son safe with her, into the destruction of that wall. The ax went straight through to the other side and she continued until she had produced a sizable hole through which she could see to the other side. Spent she stared in bewilderment at what the cavity had revealed. There was no Will. No cold, dark or empty place. Nothing except her front yard, and the car parked in the grass as it should be. As if what she had just seen didn't exist. She whimpered in utter confusion.

---

Mike and Lucas ran down their school hall pushing a cart in which they had placed Eleven as Dustin followed close behind, the fire alarms continuing to blare. Students were hurrying from the building taking the nearest exit paths.

Mike however, said, "This way!"

And he propelled the cart down a student-free hall, Dustin speeding to keep up.

---

In the red room at Hawkins High School, Jonathan prepared to enhance the image of the shadow behind Barb.

"And you're...?" said Nancy leaning forward as she watched Jonathan, not sure how to frame her question.

"Brightening. Enlarging," he explained. He had felt nervous on the way here with her so near him, but now he felt unusually comfortable in her presence as she watched. Nancy on the other hand had never seen him so at home, or intense and focused. She thought it made a favorable difference in him.

"Hmm," she sighed, turning her thoughts back to the strange creature. "Did your mom say anything else? Like, um, where it might have gone to, or..."

Jonathan, who was peering into what looked to her like a microscope, turned a knob over head and said, "No, just that it came out of the wall."

The bell from the machine rang softly and Jonathan reached up and switched it off before straightening up with a sigh. A moment later he slid a white sheet of photo paper in a tray of solution.

"How long does this take?" Nancy asked curiously as she observed Jonathan again. She felt more serene than she had all day. She figured it was because she was actually investigating something.

Jonathan stared down into the fluid and answered, "Not long."

"Have you been...doing this awhile?"

"What?"

"Photography," said Nancy.



"Yeah. I guess I'd rather observe people than, you know..." he trailed off.

"Talk to them," she finished for him, and he glanced at her as she gave a small grin.

"I know. It's weird," he conceded.

"No," she shook her head politely.

"No, it is," he said with half a smile. "It's just, sometimes...people don't really say what they're really thinking. But you capture the right moment...it says more."

"What was I saying?" she said teasingly, although she found she really wanted to know what he thought.

"What?" he asked again.

"When you took my picture."

Jonathan glanced away feeling ashamed and embarrassed again.

"I shouldn't have taken that," he said quietly. He rubbed his palm over his mouth hoping she'd forgive him. He turned to her, "I'm uh... I'm sorry."

Nancy glanced down but she couldn't help smiling a little at how scared he looked just then, but then she saw the image forming in the liquid and her grin faded as all other thought was wiped away.

"It's just-" began Jonathan, but Nancy cut across him leaning forward.

"That's it," she said, and Jonathan peered down to see the figure of a large faceless human-shaped creature looming in the image. "That's what I saw."

Jonathan stared amazed at what he had captured. It looked just as his mother had described.

"My mom..." he looked at Nancy. "I thought she was crazy 'cause she said...that's not Will's body. That he's alive."

"And if he's alive-" she looked hopefully back at him.

"Then Barbara."

---

Hopper parked his sheriff's truck in front of the coroners' office. He began to climb out of the cab, grabbing his hat as he went, but then he hesitated and on second thought left his hat on the dashboard. Walking briskly in the lobby, he noticed Patty sitting behind her desk with the phone at her ear, as if she hadn't moved since that morning.

"Hey, Patty!" he greeted her.

"Hey, uh, need something, Chief?" she asked.

"Oh, you know, I forgot my hat," he lied.

"Oh," she grinned.

Laughing, Hopper held up his index finger and said, "I'll just be a minute."

He quickly went through the doors and walked around the corner. Strolling haphazardly down the hall he noticed a state trooper sitting on a bench, reading a book. He called to him, "Hey, I love that book. It's a nasty mutt."

He strode toward him and the trooper jumped up, his right hand unmistakably going to his weapon. As Hopper sidled up to him, he stepped in front of the morgue doors, blocking his path.

"Hey, you can't be back here," he told Hopper.

"Yeah, I just got off the line with O'Bannon. He said that he needs to see you at the station. It's some emergency..." Hopper waited, hoping he'd take the bait.

"What the hell are you talking about? I don't work with O'Bannon," said the guard.

Hopper backpedaled. "Did I say O'Bannon? I meant..."

But he realized he was stuck as this man clearly didn't work for a public entity. Hopper squinted his eyes and smacked his lips.

"Okay," he said before punching the guard straight in the nose, then with his other fist he clocked him hard across his temple and cheekbone effectively knocking the man unconscious.

Huffing with adrenaline, Hopper reached down and retrieved the guard's keys, looking around the hall. Then, opening the door to the morgue, he entered a room filled with steel freezer doors. He hesitated, his heart stalling at what he was about to do. He opened the top freezer and found it empty. He next proceeded to the second and found this one occupied. Pulling out the table he pulled the sheet from the body revealing the cold, pale, lifeless face of Will Byers.

He paced away, his hand over his mouth, sickened by the sight of the dead child. He bowed his head. It sure looked like a real kid to him, so why was Joyce so convinced it wasn't Will, and why all the secrecy from the troopers? He walked back over to the body and pulled the sheet down from his throat revealing the boy's bare chest, and he pressed down on the boy's chest cavity feeling the skin. He stared. The feel of the body was soft and cold, not hard and freezing, as it should have been.

Letting out a deep breath, he steeled himself for what he came to do, and he pulled out a pocket knife. Looking down at the kid he positioned the knife directly over Will's navel, breathing heavily. Feeling like he might vomit, Hopper plunged the knife into the soft stomach and began tearing through the skin. But the knife did not saw properly and instead he found himself dragging the knife through the skin only to see it bunching up like rubber. A material began oozing from the unprofessional incision he had made. Breathing deep with disbelief and rage, Hopper pulled out copious amounts of stuffing from Will's body. Looking at the kid's face he realized this wasn't Will at all. It was a fake.

---

The sound of a car approached the Byers' home as Joyce sat distraught in her destroyed house. Headlights shone through the hole she had busted in her own wall. She looked up confused, and then groaning, got to her feet and went outside to see who had come. She

watched as her ex-husband, Lonnie, stepped out of his car.

"Babe..." he said taking in the sight of her and the hole in the house.  
"Jesus, the hell happened?"

Lost, scared, and vulnerable Joyce began to weep and she reached out to Lonnie. "Lonnie."

She wrapped her arms around his neck as he pulled her into an embrace, holding her up as she sagged into him.

---

Driving along the fence surrounding the Hawkins lab perimeter, Hopper pulled to a stop and shut off his truck. Climbing out, he strolled right up to the wired fence and, with a pair of garden shears, he began to cut his way into the restricted site.

## **6. Chapter 5 - The Flea and the Acrobat**

### **Chapter Five - The Flea and the Acrobat**

The wind whistled over the dark grounds of Hawkins Lab as two scientists left through the main entrance.

"Thanks," said the woman as the man held the door open for her.

Chatting, they headed toward their vehicles in the lot, failing to notice the man standing in the shadows near the doors they had just left through. Taking advantage of their inattention, Hopper quickly snuck through the glass door that had not yet closed. Inside, Hopper crept through the halls, checking around corners and peeking into empty offices to be sure the coast was clear. He ambled down an office corridor, the walls made with wooden panels, when he heard the approaching sound of indistinct chatter. Suddenly, two scientists entered the hall, immersed in conversation. They did not notice Hopper hastily hide inside one of the offices. Hopper waited for them to pass his hiding spot as he tried to quiet his breathing.

Once they had, Hopper continued his quest under the luminescent lights shining brightly above him. He headed directly for the one place he had seen guarded when he had been there earlier. He paused before the corridor cordoned off by the hazmat tarp. He sighed. What was he about to walk in on? But he had come this far, breaking several laws along the way, so he shrugged his shoulders and unzipped the tarp. He strolled down the hall, turned another corner, and came to a set of double doors. He attempted to open them but found the doors locked. He rattled them, frustrated.

Looking to his right he noticed a key swipe pad. Before he had even begun to contemplate a way in he registered the cock of a gun behind him.

"Hands up. Hands up!" yelled the security guard flanked by a soldier who also aimed his gun at Hopper.

Hopper raised his arms in surrender and said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa."

Pivoting slowly to face the men he recognized the guide who had shown him around the day before.

"Forgot all the cameras, bud?" said the guard.

"Look, Dr. Brenner asked for me specifically, okay? How else to you think I got in here?" he lied smoothly.

The man pulled his radio from his belt. "What's your name again?"

"It's Jim Hopper," he snorted. Seriously? The guy was really going to pretend to not remember who he was. "Chief Jim Hopper."

The man hit the button on his radio and began to transmit, "Yeah, I've got Jim Hopper-"

However, Hopper drew back his right fist and punched him hard in the face. With a loud grunt of pain the man went down unconscious, but before his body had hit the floor Hopper had pulled his gun from his belt and pointed it at the soldier. He forced the soldier back against the wall, pressed his arm out to the side and took his gun. After tucking the gun away, with his own still aimed at the soldier, Hopper held up the man's badge on his chest.

"Hey, you mind if I borrow this?" he yanked it from the man's uniform and took a few steps back. His gun still trained on the soldier, he swiped the badge through the keypad. There was a buzz and the doors opened. Watching for a sign of movement from his hostage, Hopper entered the corridor beyond and once on the other side the doors closed. As soon as they had he lowered his gun and looked about him. He found another keypad and raising his gun again he shot at the system, destroying it.

---

"Drink," said Lonnie after having poured a glass of whiskey for Joyce in her wrecked living room. "It'll calm your nerves. Help you think straight, yeah?"

Joyce shook her head, sitting on the couch with a blanket around her shoulders.

"I don't know what to do," she said hopelessly.

Lonnie sat beside her, trying to sooth her. "I know. I know."

"This whole time...I...I could...I could feel him," she gestured at her heart. "He was...he was so close. He was...he was right there."

Lonnie glanced at the wall where he had nailed a blue tarp over the hole Joyce had busted in the house.

"I knew he was alive," she continued. "Our hands...our hands were almost touching. Now it's like I...uh...God, it's like I can't feel him anymore."

She began to sob in earnest but after a glance at Lonnie she said disgusted, "Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"Like how everybody is looking at me. Like I'm out of my damn mind."

Lonnie took hold of her hand. "Hey. You're not gonna like this, but I think you need to seriously consider the possibility that all this...it's in your head."

Joyce scoffed but Lonnie continued.

"You remember your Aunt Darlene?"

She snatched her hand away from Lonnie's. "No. No this is not that."

"I mean, when something like this happens, your mind makes up stuff for you to cope, you know? I mean, Jesus, there's a funeral tomorrow for our little boy and you're saying his body is fake. He's in the wall. I mean, how do you explain that?" Lonnie asked incredulously. Joyce's lips trembled as she cried, unable to answer his questions. "It just doesn't make sense. It doesn't. At least go talk to a shrink or...what about Pastor Charles or someone...?"

"I don't...well, they can't help," she griped at the useless advice.

"Joyce, you just told me...that Will is gone. What else is there to do?"

Breaking down again, Joyce put her head in her hands.

"Hey," Lonnie said cautiously. Joyce ignored him and instead drained her glass of whiskey before reaching for the bottle and filling it again.

---

Hopper searched the dark halls of the lab with his flashlight searching for any sign that Will was there.

"Will?" his voice seemed to echo and he turned back to view the empty corridor behind him feeling paranoid. It would not be long before backup would arrive for the soldier and they would come after him. Continuing his hunt he called out again as he aimed his flashlight into a dark and abandoned laboratory. "Will? Will?"

Making his way through the halls he continued to call for Will. He next entered a tiny room which contained a small bed and bedside table. Looking up he noticed a security camera in a ceiling corner. It was trained directly on the bed. A stuffed lion sat on the gray covers.

On the wall by the bed was a child's drawing of what looked like a table with some kind of animal on top. A thick horizontal line drawn above the table with a thinner vertical line drawn downward ending in a yellow circular feature demonstrated a lightbulb hanging over the animal. Two stick figures, one tall one short, were drawn beside the table. The tall one was labeled "Papa" and the short one had the number "eleven" over it. Hopper didn't quite know what to make of it. Why label one with a name and the other with an age? Or was it an age? But then what else could it be? All he knew was that it was most definitely a child who stayed here. Will had to be close.

---

Positioned on her stomach in the basement of Mike's house, Eleven's head rested on a pillow, her feet propped up on additional pillows as she lay across the sofa still wearing her blond wig. Mike sat at the other end of the sofa next to Eleven's feet as he talked to Dustin and Lucas. They had been rehashing the days events for over an hour, but they had come up with nothing.

"What was Will saying?" Mike asked. "Like home...Like home...but dark?"



He stood, his mind going over half-formed possibilities that made no sense. Lucas' hands were folded before him and his head was bowed.

"And empty," he added.

Thinking hard, Dustin sighed. "Empty and cold. Wait, did he say cold?"

"I don't know," complained Lucas. "The stupid radio kept going in and out."

Dustin sighed again, looking up at the ceiling. "It's like riddles in the dark."

Mike paced as Eleven watched wearily.

"Like home. Like his house?" he said spinning around as he remembered that Eleven had taken them to Will's house when attempting to take them to where he was.

"Or maybe like Hawkins," Lucas suggested.

"Upside Down," said Eleven tiredly.

"What'd she say?" asked Lucas.

"Upside Down," repeated Mike as it dawned on him.

"What?" asked Lucas again.

"Upside Down," Mike repeated and he walked over to the table in the middle of the basement holding up the *Dungeons and Dragons* game board. "When El showed us where Will was, she flipped the board over, remember?"

He flipped it right side up again as the boys huddled around the table, then he flipped it back to the way Eleven had and said, "Upside Down. Dark. Empty."

Lucas looked to Dustin. "Do you understand what he's talking about?"

"No," Dustin answered.

"Guys, come on, just think about it. When El took us to find Will, she took us to his house, right?"

"Yeah. And he wasn't there," Lucas reminded him.

"But what if he was there? What if we just couldn't see him? What if he was on the other side? What if this is Hawkins," he flipped the board right side up again. "And..." (he flipped it back upside down again) "...this is where Will is? The Upside Down."

"Like the Vale of Shadows," said Dustin suddenly.

---

"Will?"

Hopper ran through the corridors now. He found several white hazmat suits in a dark room and alarms blared faintly from somewhere. He knew they must be for an intruder alert. He kept searching, the beam of his flashlight bouncing off empty room after empty room, his gun held firmly in front of him.

"Will?"

He sensed the approach of men and he darted to the end of a corridor at which there was an elevator. He pressed the call button several times, distant shouts of men coming to apprehend him. Beams from flashlights appeared around the corner and soon he could see the guards come dashing toward him just as the elevator doors opened and Hopper stepped in.

"I see him! Stop!" a guard shouted, but the elevator doors enclosed Hopper within.

---

Dustin pulled out the large manual guide to the game of *Dungeons & Dragons*. He opened it to a page titled "The Vale of Shadows". He read out to the others, "The Vale of Shadows is a dimension that is a dark reflection or echo of our world. It is a place of decay and death. A plane out of phase. A place of monsters."

Lucas and Mike looked fearfully at one another as Dustin continued, "It is right next to you, and you don't even see it."

---

The elevator doors opened and Hopper peered into the darkness lit only by his small flashlight. He noticed flurries floating on the air, like weightless snow. It was an eerie sight.

He called quietly, "Will?"

Electricity flickered and he coughed. The air felt congested down here. "Will? Will?"

---

"An alternate dimension," stated Mike.

"But ...how...how do we get there?" asked Lucas hesitantly.

"You cast Shadow Walk," replied Dustin.

"In real life, dummy," Lucas shot.

"We can't Shadow Walk, but..." Dustin continued and he peered down for a moment before looking at the sofa. "Maybe she can."

Mike and Lucas both turned to stare at Eleven, too. She merely stared back, her head still resting on the pillow, wiped from her day.

"Do you know how to get there?" Mike asked her. "To the Upside Down?"

She gave a small shake of her head, her expression blank.

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Lucas, exasperated.

Dustin stared down at the image in the article of The Vale of Shadows. It was indeed a dark, cold looking place.

---

Hopper walked into a control room of an underground lab. He covered his face with his arm as he coughed again, the flurries acting like irritants to his airway. He gazed at the bizarre sight before him.

"What the hell?" he whispered.

Stepping closer he examined the strangest thing he had ever seen,

and he didn't know how to even begin identifying it. He was staring at a wall infested with some type of plant-like phenomenon. What looked like vines seemed to spread out of it. It was large and ugly. Most unsettling of all was that the thing seemed to growl and pulse, like a heartbeat. A dim, orange light from within pulsed along with beat. Without thinking he reached out to touch the weblike substance over the center, but as he did he heard a screech behind him and sensed something lurking in the room. He spun, spooked by whatever it was. His hand jumped to the gun he had tucked back into his belt, and he pulled it out and held in front of him. There was a tank of green-tinted water and when he next turned he saw a man in a hazmat suit. His heart gave a great jolt at the sight.

"Hey! Hey!" he shouted in alarm, but Hopper was ambushed by another suited man who quickly stabbed him in the neck with a syringe, sedating him immediately.

---

Jonathan entered through the front door of his home with every intention of talking to his mother about what he and Nancy had discovered. However, he came to a halt as he found his mother curled up on the couch next to his dad, of all people. They both quickly sat up at the sight of him.

"Hey, kid," said Lonnie.

"What's going on?" asked Jonathan.

Joyce answered, "Your dad's, uh, going to stay here tonight. On the couch."

"Yeah, I'm here as long as you need me, okay?" Lonnie told him. "How are you holding up?"

Jonathan did not answer him but instead strolled over to the wall where the tarp was nailed up over a hole.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Don't worry about that," Lonnie parried the question away.

But again Jonathan ignored him. "Mom...that thing you saw before,

did it come back?"

Joyce mouthed mutely, confused, and Lonnie said, "Jonathan, that's enough."

Finally, Jonathan gave Lonnie a very significant glare.

"Can we talk?" he said. "Alone?"

Now in Jonathan's room he confronted his father. "You need to leave."

"Look, I know you're upset," said Lonnie. "We all are. But you need to listen to me. Your mother is sick. Really sick."

"Yeah. Well, you being here, you're just making things worse, like always," accused Jonathan.

"Worse?"

"Yeah!" Jonathan could not help raising his voice.

Lonnie gestured back at the living room. "She took down that wall with an ax. She said that Will was inside and that he's talking to her."

Jonathan shrugged and said carelessly, "Yeah. Maybe he was."

"This isn't some kind of joke. Your mom was half-frozen to death when I got here. Trembling, scared out of her mind. You come in here and you start feeding into her hallucinations or whatever the hell you want to call it, you're gonna push her right over the edge. You hear me?"

Lonnie glared at his son however, Jonathan did not respond so he said, "Look, I'm on your side. I'm here to help. I'm gonna make things better around here for all of us."

Jonathan scoffed. "Thank God you're here."

He backed away from Lonnie, wanting as much distance between them as possible.

"Do me a favor," said Lonnie. "At the funeral tomorrow, just behave. If not for me, for your mother."

Lonnie pointed at a poster on Jonathan's bedroom wall of the 1981 horror film *The Evil Dead*.

"Take that down. It's inappropriate," he commanded. Jonathan only glared as Lonnie retreated, and he decided he would never take it down as long as he lived here.

---

Mike sat before the mirror on his dresser as his dad leaned over him from behind arranging a tie around his neck.

"Good," Ted muttered.

"Ah. Dad you're...you're choking me," Mike complained as he tried to loosen it.

"Ah...there. It's supposed to be a little tight," Ted finished and examined him in the mirror. "Looks good."

In the bedroom next to his, Nancy stood in front of her mirror as Karen zipped up her dress for her.

"Here we go. You look nice sweetie," Karen said as she peered at her daughter's reflection.

Nancy glanced up as well and examined her appearance, but she had never cared less about how she looked.

"Anything else?" Karen asked her. "You can borrow my black heels if you want. The ones you wore to Cathy's birthday."

"I'm fine. Thanks," Nancy answered. Karen nodded glumly.

Behind Joyce's house sat Castle Byers. In the grim morning it seemed lonely and sullen. The Byers' family dog trotted into the small wooden structure and, with a sad whimper, he lay across the mattress inside missing his kind friend who was the only one who played with him anymore.

Inside his room, Jonathan criticized his reflection in the mirror as he struggled with tying his tie.

"Ugh!" He pulled it off in disgust.

Across the hall Joyce sat on Will's bed, confused and lost. He had been so close. Right there! But she still had no idea where he was or how to get to him, and it seemed he was no longer here. So then, where was he? Lonnie appeared in the doorway wearing a black suit.

"Come on," he said. "Time to go."

Joyce shook her head slowly and groaned, "No."

Lonnie came forward and held out his hand. "Come on."

She sighed and reluctantly took his hand and he guided her out.

---

"Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Pastor Charles looked up from his bible at the mournful gathering. More than fifty people had shown for Will's funeral. They each held a rose in their hands, some yellow, some white.

The pastor continued, "It's times like these that our faith is challenged. How, if He is truly benevolent...could God take from us someone so young, so innocent?"

Joyce, not listening to the words, peered around at the guests, disgusted with the proceeding. How could these people show up for what she knew was not her boy? How could they so willingly accept that Will was gone when she knew the truth? Beside her, Jonathan listened to the pastor carefully, considering his words. But God, if there was such a being, had not taken Will. Not yet at least. He knew that now.

"It would be easy to turn away from God," Pastor Charles went on. "But we must remember that nothing, not even tragedy, can separate us from His love."

Lucas stared solemnly at the ground, but Dustin, who had glanced to his right, grinned and nudged Lucas and Mike on either side of him and nodded to someone in the crowd.

"We are here today to find comfort in the truth of scripture, and to surround Will and his family..."

Mike and Lucas noticed what Dustin had. A pretty blond girl, standing a few feet away, stared down at Will's coffin, crying. They watched shock as Dustin gloated.

"Just wait till we tell Will that Jennifer Hayes was crying at his funeral."

Karen leaned down to shush the boys, giving them stern glances. At the end of the proceedings the guests tossed their roses, one by one, onto the small, humble coffin which had been lowered into the open slot where Will's body was meant to rest. As people filed away Karen addressed Lonnie, giving him a hug.

"I'm so, so sorry," she said.

"Oh, thank you so much for coming," he responded. Joyce stood idly behind him, her arms folded, staring down at the wooden box in the ground.

Ted shook Lonnie's hand. "Yeah, if there's anything we can do..."

"I appreciate it. Thank you so much," Lonnie nodded.

Their voices seemed far away from Joyce, as distant as a memory, further than the recent memory that came to her.

---

*Joyce stood at her kitchen counter, light shining through the window, preparing a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for Will. She glimpsed over her shoulder at Will who sat drawing at the kitchen table.*

*"I see Will the Wise is back," she said. He nodded and she pointed at the picture he was working on. "What's that shooting out of his cane?"*

*"Fireballs," he stated still coloring. "I couldn't find a red crayon, so that's*



*why it's green."*

*"Oh, well...if he's so wise why does he need fireballs? Why can't he, you know, outsmart the bad guys?" She set the plate, with his sandwich, on the tabletop beside him.*

*Will nodded. "Most of the time, yeah, totally. But...sometimes the bad guys are smart, too. You know?"*

*"So he needs the fireballs?"*

*"Well, yeah, to burn to them to a crisp," he answered with relish.*

*"Alright. Well, I don't know who's been raising you, but I'm gonna get you some new crayons because it looks like he's shooting cabbages," she snickered as she ruffled his hair.*

*He chuckled as he examined his work. They did look like cabbages. He smiled and drew lines onto the green fireballs to create the appearance of sparks flying from the fiery weapons.*

---

Hopper came to with a start, his body drenched in sweat. He sat up quickly and realized he was lying on his own couch. Empty beer cans and pills from old prescription bottles littered the coffee table, his gun was also present among the clutter. It looked as if he had merely passed out drunk the night before as he had almost every day for the past four years. Throwing the blanket that curled across his legs to the side he snatched up his gun. He dashed down the steps from the front door of his trailer. He kicked up dirt from the ground as he scanned his plot of land for intruders, but there was no one.

Back inside, Hopper stood inspecting his neck for puncture marks in the mirror in his bathroom. With his finger he felt the presence of a minuscule scab from that of a needle. Last night had happened. Of course he had known that, but with all he had discovered he had to be sure.

The men and women of Hawkins Lab had spared him but he knew they would want to keep an eye on him. He slid his fingers over the frame of the mirror, then he checked the shade of the overhead light.

He found nothing, but he did not stop there. He unscrewed the bulb and felt inside the casing. He checked all the lights in the bathroom in this way, then moved on throughout his trailer. He tore through cabinets and closets, ripped books apart, threw dishes and various papers to the floor. His warpath led him to the stove, the sink, the radio in his kitchen. Items fell at random in his mad search.

He shoved everything off his kitchen table and flipped it over to scan the underside. He grabbed his phone and banged it against the counter until it burst open and he looked inside the machine. He investigated lamps as he had the lights in the bathroom, shredded his couch cushions and pillows with his pocket knife. He brushed items off the chimney shelf, disregarding the shatters of glass. He took apart his television set amid his possessions that covered the floor. He still found nothing.

His legs pushed things out of his way as he glanced around searching for additional places they might have used. He looked up at the ceiling in his living room. Reaching up he unscrewed the lightbulb from the overhead lamp and finally he found a small, round, golden disc connected to the wires of his electricity. Though it was unlike any he had seen, he knew it was designed to do the same as any other eavesdropping device. He gritted his teeth in fury.

---

In a dark room at Hawkins Lab men and women sat among cigarette smoke each wearing headphones and sitting before desk lamps and notepads. At the end of the long table Brenner held one of the ears of a pair of headphones to his ear, listening to a recording from the night before.

"Will! Will, its us! Are you there?" shouted Lucas.

"Can you hear us? We're here!" came Dustin's voice.

Will's distorted voice called out. "Hello? Mom?"

"Why can't he hear us?" asked Lucas.

"I don't know!" shouted Mike.

"Mom, it's coming!" Will's voice echoed.

Brenner set the headphones down and announced to his employees that stood by him waiting, "She was there."

---

The church bell tolled as people quietly left the cemetery for the reception. Jonathan and Nancy huddled next to one another on the ground against a black cast iron fence hidden from view.

"This is where we know for sure it's been, right?" asked Jonathan holding out a map he had drawn of the area around his home.

Nancy pointed at a spot on the imprecise map. "So, that's...?"

"Steve's house," answered Jonathan in regards to the red 'X' on the map. "And that's the woods where they found Will's bike..." (he pointed at another 'X' next to Steve's) "and that's my house."

"It's all so close," said Nancy.

"Yeah. Exactly. I mean, it's all within a mile or something. Whatever this thing is, it's...it's not traveling far."

Nancy peered into his eyes.

"You want to go out there," she stated.

"We might not find anything," Jonathan admitted.

"I found something," Nancy pointed out. "And if we do see it...then what?"

Jonathan sighed and glanced away before turning back to her. "We kill it."

Making sure his dad was still immersed in conversation Jonathan opened the passenger door of Lonnie's car and got in. Nancy watched nervously as he used a pen knife to pick open the compartment box under the dashboard.

"What are you doing?" she asked doubtfully.

"Just give me a second," he replied.

He successfully broke in and Nancy checked behind her to be sure no one was watching. When she turned back around to face Jonathan she found that he had pulled out a gun and was checking to see if it was loaded. She gaped in shock.

"Are you serious?" she snapped as he pulled out a box of bullets and stuffed it in his jacket pocket.

"What? You want to find this thing and take another photo? Yell at it?" he asked sarcastically.

With the gun in hand he shut the compartment box, climbed out of the car and shut the door.

"This is a terrible idea," worried Nancy.

Jonathan stuffed an extra box of bullets in his jacket pocket and tucked the gun out of sight inside his belt under his jacket.

"Yeah, well, it's the best we've got," he said. "What? You can tell someone, but they're not gonna believe you. You know that."

"Your mom would," griped Nancy.

"She's been through enough," he said almost pleadingly.

"She deserves to know," Nancy insisted.

"Yeah, and I'll tell her...when this thing is dead," he answered. Nancy looked away feeling extremely anxious.

---

Principal Coleman entered the AV club room guiding a man wearing a blue jumpsuit and brown utility belt.

"I don't know what in the world caused it," said Coleman.

"Let's take a look, huh?" said the repairman as he walked around the ham radio to examine the damage from the flames of the day before.

"Yeah," answered Coleman. "Mr. Clarke says he's never seen anything like it."

"Mr. Clarke?" asked the repairman interested. He set his clipboard onto the table and pulled out a flashlight.

"Yeah, he runs the AV club."

"That right?" acknowledged the man as he aimed his light onto the radio inspecting the charred machine.

"Apparently, some of the less athletic types go nuts for this stuff," Coleman stated as he leaned over the radio as well.

Outside of the school a white Hawkins power and light van started up as the repairman ambled toward it. He climbed up into the passenger side and gave a meaningful glance at his partner who sat in the driver's seat.

---

At Will's reception Joyce stared around uncomfortably at all the people. Her mind could not settle on anything and therefore details went by unnoticed.

At the refreshment table Scott Clarke placed a few small items onto his paper plate.

"Mr. Clarke?" said Mike.

Scott turned to find Mike, Lucas, and Dustin behind him. Though the latter was currently helping himself to the food, Mike and Lucas looked at him hopefully.

"Oh, hey, there," he said quietly. "How are you boys holding up?"

His students were silent for a moment, other than Dustin's loud munching. Mike peered sadly at the floor.

After a glance at Dustin Lucas said slowly, "We're...in...mourning."

And he too looked at the floor sadly to complete the effect.

Dustin stared disgruntled at the cookie in his hand. "Man, these aren't real Nilla Wafers."

Lucas gave a soft sigh of irritation and Mike asked quickly, "We were wondering if you had time to talk?"

"We have some questions," said Lucas.

"A lot of questions," added Mike.

Around a table Scott sat with the boys ready to hear their questions. He felt a little nervous over the coming conversation, but was determined to do what he could to help these kids mourn the loss of their friend.

Mike began, "So, you know how in *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan talks about other dimensions? Like beyond our world?"

"Yeah, sure. Theoretically," nodded Scott.

"Right, theoretically," Mike echoed quickly.

"So, theoretically," Lucas emphasized. "How do we travel there?"

"You guys have been thinking about Hugh Everett's *Many-worlds Interpretation*, haven't you?" Scott asked. It made sense they would turn to science for comfort and his heart warmed for them once again as they stared around at one another, clueless. "Well, basically, there are parallel universes. Just like our world, but just infinite variations of it. Which means there's a world out there where none of this tragic stuff ever happened."

"Yeah, that's not what we're talking about," said Lucas.

"Oh," Scott replied caught off guard.

"We were thinking more of an evil dimension, like the Vale of Shadows. You know the Vale of Shadows?" asked Dustin taking a bite of his cookie.

"An echo of the Material Plane, where necrotic and shadow magic-" began Scott excitedly as Dustin nodded enthusiastically, but Mike cut

across him.

"Yeah, exactly. If that did exist, a place like the Vale of Shadows, how would we travel there?"

"Theoretically," Lucas inserted.

"Well..." Scott thought for a moment. Holding up his paper plate he pulled a pen from his pocket, clicked it and began to draw on the plate, saying, "Picture...an acrobat...standing on a tightrope."

He showed the boys what he had drawn, two thin parallel lines with a stick figure above them.

"Now, the tightrope is our dimension. And our dimension has rules. You can move forwards, or backwards," he drew arrows on either side of the stick figure pointing at opposite ends of the plate. "But, what if...right next to our acrobat, there is a flea?"

He now drew a fuzzy dot, the boys listening with rapt attention.

"Now, the flea can also travel back and forth, just like the acrobat. Right?"

Mike nodded trying to keep up. "Right."

"Here's where things get really interesting. The flea can also travel this way...along the side of the rope..." Scott drew an arrow between the parallel lines with another underneath the 'tightrope'. "He can even go...underneath the rope."

The boys stared at each other full of understanding and they said simultaneously. "Upside Down."

"Exactly," smiled Scott.

"But we're not the flea, we're the acrobat," Mike said to make sure.

Scott nodded. "In this metaphor, yes, we're the acrobat."

"So we can't go upside down?" asked Lucas.

"No," said Scott simply.

"Well, is there any way for the acrobat to get to the Upside Down?" asked Dustin.

Scott thought hard again. "Well...you'd have to create a massive amount of energy. More than humans are currently capable of creating, mind you, to open up some kind of tear in time and space, and then..."

He folded his paper plate in half then poked a hole in it with his pen, yanking his pen back out he said, "You create a doorway."

"Like a gate?" questioned Dustin.

"Sure. Like a gate. But, again, this is all-"

Lucas finished for him, "Theoretical."

Mike, hoping he did not sound suspicious asked, "But...but what if this gate already existed?"

"Well, if it did, I...I think we'd know," said Scott. "It would disrupt gravity, the magnetic field, our environment. Heck, it might even swallow us up whole. Science is neat. But I'm afraid it's not very forgiving."

---

Climbing out of their squad car Officers Powell and Callahan ambled over to Hopper's trailer. They peered into the windows, searching for Hopper, and saw that the place was a disaster.

"Whoa," murmured Callahan and he knocked on the door. "Hey, Chief! Whoa!"

Hopper had opened the door, and waving a gun around, he yelled, "Hey!"

Hopper stumbled out still holding his gun up. Both Powell and Callahan flinched and stepped away from him.

"Jesus, Chief," said Powell concerned as he took in Hopper's



disheveled appearance. "You alright?"

Hopper shut his door and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"We tried calling, but-" started Powell.

Hopper interrupted him, snapping, "Yeah, the phone's dead."

Callahan hesitated then said, "Hey, so Bev Mooney came in this morning all upset. Said that Dale and Henry went hunting yesterday...and they didn't come back home."

"She thought they were on another binger, but she's not so sure now," Powell continued.

"I think this whole Will Byers thing has everybody on edge," Callahan suggested.

"Where was this?" asked Hopper.

"It was at the station," Callahan responded confused.

"No, no," Hopper shook his head frustrated. "Where did Henry and Dale go hunting?"

"Oh. Uh, out near Kerley," said Callahan.

"Mirkwood," Hopper whispered. That was right out there by the Byers' place. And Hawkins Lab.

Powell frowned. "What?"

"Okay," Hopper made the decision just then not to explain to them what he had discovered. The less people who knew, the better. "You go back to the station. I'll take care of this, alright?"

"Are you sure?" Callahan said doubtfully.

Opening his door to head back inside, Hopper said firmly, "Yeah, leave it."

Before Hopper could disappear however, Callahan added, "Oh, hey. Uh, they found Barbara's car."

His interest peaked Hopper stepped back out and shut his door again.

"What?"

"Barbara Holland's car," Powell said. "Seems she ran away after all. Staties found it late last night at a bus station."

"Funny, right? They keep doing our job for us," Callahan smirked.

Hopper chuckled humorlessly. "Yeah. It's funny."

Turning around he went back into his trailer without a backward glance at his officers. Callahan leaned against the side of the trailer, throwing a look to Powell who raised his eyebrows in slight alarm. A minute later as Powell started the engine to the squad car Callahan climbed into the passenger side.

"Is he off his meds again?" Callahan wondered.

"He's been spending too much time with Joyce Byers," Powell stated. "That's what I think."

He backed out from the dirt lot and drove away.

---

Joyce paced out from the bedrooms in her house smoking a cigarette as she investigated the loud hammering noises coming from the living room. She found Lonnie nailing wooden boards over the hole she had made. The tarp discarded to the side.

"What are you doing?" she griped.

Gesturing at the hole Lonnie responded sarcastically. "What does it look like I'm doing? You want to freeze to death all winter?"

As Lonnie resumed hammering Joyce noticed several coils of Christmas lights sitting atop the coffee table. She pointed at them angrily.

"I told you not to take these down."

"They were in the way, babe," Lonnie said dismissively. Joyce put her

cigarette out and picked up one of the coils. "How long are you gonna keep those up? I mean, really?"

Joyce did not answer, she merely went over to the wall a few feet from where he was hammering and began to hang the lights back up.

With another glance at her, Lonnie went back to nailing up the boards and he said, "You know, it's a shame what they've done to this family."

Joyce glanced at him confused. "What?"

"The Sattler Company. I went to the quarry on the way over here. I just wanted to look around, you know? Couldn't believe it. Just couldn't believe it," he hammered at the nail he was holding to the board. "No warning signs, no fence, no nothing. Ought to be held accountable if you ask me."

Joyce did not answer. She did not believe Will had drowned in the quarry and therefore, the absence of a fence or warning signs were of no consequence to her, but she found herself feeling troubled anyhow. What did Lonnie mean by hold them accountable?

---

Eleven flinched as Mike violently poked a hole into a folded sheet of notebook paper from his backpack, on which he had drawn a stick figure on a line as Mr. Clarke had done.

"It would take a lot of energy to build a gate like this," admitted Mike. "But that's got to be what happened. Otherwise, how'd Will get there, right?"

She gave a small nod. "Right."

She was sitting on the basement couch next to Mike, and Lucas sat on the bottom step of the stairs as Dustin paced nearby.

"What we want to know is, do you know where the gate is?" Lucas asked her. She shook her head and Lucas signed in annoyance. "Then how do you know about the Upside Down?"

She merely stared down at her hands before peering over at Dustin in

confusion as he paced back and forth holding something in his hand. Mike and Lucas glanced over at him as well.

"Dustin, what are you doing?" Mike asked him. "Dustin? Dustin!"

"Dustin!" Lucas shouted angrily.

Coming to a halt, Dustin looked up at the others as if he had forgotten they were there. Then he said, "I...I need to see your compasses."

"What?" Mike asked confused.

"Your compasses. All of your compasses, right now!" Dustin commanded loudly.

Having retrieved every compass they owned Mike and Lucas tossed them onto the flipped game board. The *Dungeons and Dragons* guidebook still lay opened to the page detailing the Vale of Shadows. Dustin turned each compass toward him and examined them.

"What's exciting about this?" Mike questioned him.

"Well, they're all facing north, right?" Dustin asked.

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Yeah, so."

"Well, that's not true north," replied Dustin.

"What do you mean?" Mike frowned.

"I mean exactly what I just said. That's not true north. Are you both seriously this dense?" he snapped as they both stared at him in confusion. Lucas shrugged, clueless at what Dustin was getting at. Dustin sighed heavily. "The sun rises in the east, and it sets in the west. Right? Which means that's true north."

He pointed toward the wall opposite him, toward what was the front side of the house. Mike peered down at the compasses which were all pointed in the opposite direction.

"So what you're saying is the compasses are broken," said Mike.

With another sigh, Dustin picked up one of the compasses and waved it at him.. "Do you even understand how a compass works? Do you see a battery pack on this?"

"No," Mike responded annoyed.

"No, you don't. Because it doesn't need one. The needle's naturally drawn to the Earth's magnetic North Pole," he set the compass back on the table and Lucas looked down at it.

"So what's wrong with them," he asked.

"Well, that's what I couldn't figure out, but then I remembered. You can change the direction of a compass with a magnet. If there's the presence of a more powerful magnetic field, the needle deflects to that power," Dustin explained. "And then I remembered what Mr. Clarke said. The Gate would have so much power-"

"It would disrupt the electromagnetic field," finished Mike excitedly. He suddenly had a newfound respect for Dustin's brainpower.

"Exactly," nodded Dustin.

"Meaning, if we follow the compasses' north..." Lucas continued.

"They should lead us to the Gate," Dustin completed the thought.

Eleven, who had been listening closely to the conversation, looked away from the boys. Excited as they were with this new information, they failed to notice the deepening in her breathing, or the way in which her eyes flitted around the basement fearfully.

---

As Lonnie showered Joyce quietly began searching through his saddlebag. She pulled out his wallet in which she found a paper folded up several times. Opening it she found that it was a flyer for Kohner Law Offices and Paralegal Services. The advertisement was for legal cases revolved around accidental injuries and death. She dropped her hands to her knees with an angry sigh. She felt she should have known this, but the blow during a time like this was more painful than ever.

---

In the Wheelers' covered awning Nancy picked up a wooden baseball bat. It felt strange in her hands as she hadn't played for several years. She held it up and took a few practice swings. The momentum of the swing caused her to turn in her spot so that she failed to notice the young man who approached her from the yard. Only after nearly hitting him with her third swing did she notice that Steve had joined her.

She jumped back in surprise with a small shout. Steve also leapt back holding up his arms.

"Whoa, whoa, hey, whoa, whoa."

"What are you doing here?" she asked with an exhaled breath. If she was honest with herself she had to admit that she had completely forgotten about Steve. It was as if she were now living in another world. One in which Steve was of little significance.

"What are you doing?" he asked her.

She shrugged. "Nothing."

"I hope that's not meant for me," he asked a little concerned, gesturing at the bat.

"What? No. Oh, no, I was just...thinking about joining softball," she lied off the top of her head.

"Oh. Well, uh...listen, I'm really sorry," he said, his face turning into one of remorse. "I mean, even before you threatened me with the baseball bat."

He leaned back against Ted's car and she looked away, not ready to forgive him. "Okay."

"I panicked and...I mean I was a total dick," he continued.

"Yeah, you were," Nancy emphasized.

Steve sighed and he actually looked a little scared. She could not help softening toward him and she asked, "Did you get in trouble with your parents?"

"Totally, but...you know, who cares?" he shrugged as if it didn't bother him. "Screw 'em. Any news about Barbara?"

Nancy shook her head slowly.

"Parents heard from her? Or..." he continued.

"No," she responded. It suddenly hit her that it had been over two days since she'd last seen Barb. It felt so much longer.

Steve stepped forward. "Hey, listen. Why don't we, uh, why don't we catch a movie tonight, you know? Just kinda pretend everything's normal for a few hours. *All the Right Moves* is still playing. You know, with your lover boy from *Risky Business*?"

Nancy stared down at the ground forcing a smile. "Yeah, I know."

"You know, Carol thinks I actually kinda look like him. What do you think? Huh?" he turned his face aside in a pose, then grabbed her bat and held it up to his mouth like a microphone and sang, "*Just take those old records off the shelf! I'll sit and listen to them by myself.*"

Nancy tried to think of an excuse that would get Steve to leave without hurting his feelings. "I just, I...I don't think I can. I've been really busy with this whole funeral thing and...with my brother. It's been really hard on him."

Steve nodded in understanding but he still looked disappointed. "Yeah, sure. Sure, yeah, yeah."

"So..." hinted Nancy when he only stood there.

"I should go," Steve realized.

"Sorry. I'll call you later. Is that okay?" she could tell he knew she was blowing him off, and she quickly kissed his cheek so that he would know it wasn't because of him.

"Yeah. Yeah, of course," he nodded, and as he sauntered off he sang under his breath. "*Just take those old records off the shelf! I'll sit and listen to them by myself.*"

Nancy sighed as she watched him leave. A dog barked from a neighboring yard, and once Steve was out of sight she held the baseball bat up again and swung at an invisible monster.

---

"You were here for the money!" Joyce screamed furiously.

"No!" shouted Lonnie as Joyce slammed the flyer she had found in his wallet onto his chest.

"The money! Admit it!" she yelled. "You aren't here 'cause of Will! You never cared about him! You never did!"

"Jesus, Joyce, it was his funeral today! Do we have to do this right now?"

"I can't believe I fell for this," she scoffed angrily at herself.

"I'm here to help, Joyce," Lonnie claimed.

"To help?" she asked skeptically.

"We could use that money for good," he explained.

"Oh - oh like maybe to pay off your debts?" Her voice dripped with sarcasm.

"To pay for Jonathan to go to school!" yelled Lonnie angrily.

Joyce pointed a shaking finger at him. "Oh, don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Lie to me!" she shouted.

"I'm not lying to you!"

"Yeah, well, where does he wanna go? Huh?"

"What?"

Joyce hollered at him. "Where does Jonathan want to go to college?"



"We get that money, anywhere he damn well pleases!"

Joyce was now yelling in his face beside herself in anger. "NYU, Lonnie! He's wanted to go to NYU since he was *six years old!*"

"So then he goes to NYU!" he bellowed back at her. His breath wafted into her face and she smelled whiskey. Suddenly, she hated everything about him.

"Get out. Get out!"

"You need me here, Joyce," he said.

Joyce laughed ironically. "Oh, brother, I have not needed you for a long time!"

She shoved him again.

"Oh no? Look what happened," he threw at her. She stared in absolute fury that he would throw this into her face.

"Oh, don't you dare. At least I was here!"

"Oh, come on, Joyce! Just look around at this place. All your Christmas lights. What the hell am I supposed to think? You're such a great mom? You're a mess!"

"Maybe I am a mess. Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe I'm out of my mind! But, God help me, I will keep these lights up until the day I die if I think there's a chance that Will's still out there!" she pointed wildly at the lights. Then, snatching his bag from the chair she threw it at him and screamed, "Now get out! Get out of my house!"

---

A gunshot rang out into the afternoon. Jonathan held Lonnie's gun out in front of him. He fired another shot while aiming carefully at a beer can sitting atop a tree stump. Every shot he took missed its target and soon he had run through the entire clip.

"Sh..." he sighed in frustration.

"You're supposed to hit the cans, right?" Nancy called to him as she

approached.

Jonathan glanced at her and smirked. "No, actually, you see the spaces in between the cans? I'm aiming for those."

"Ah," she nodded with a smile. She set her bag and bat on the ground as Jonathan held up the gun for her to see.

"You ever shot a gun before?" he asked.

She scoffed. "Have you met my parents?"

Jonathan grinned as he refilled the clip. "Yeah, I haven't shot one since I was ten. My dad took me hunting on my birthday. He made me kill a rabbit."

"A rabbit?" she frowned.

"Yeah. I guess he thought it would make me into more of a man or something. I cried for a week," he admitted.

Nancy pictured a younger Jonathan aiming a gun at a small rabbit crying and begging his father to allow him to spare the animal. What a tragic thing to force a child to do.

"Jesus," she muttered.

"What? I'm a fan of Thumper," Jonathan joked.

"I meant your dad," she said with a small chuckle.

"Yeah. I guess he and my mother loved each other at some point, but...I wasn't around for that part," he held up the gun preparing to shoot again but Nancy held out her hand for it. He handed it her and pointed at the cans. "Um, yeah. Just, uh, point and shoot."

Nancy looked up at the cans but she didn't really notice them. "I don't think my parents have ever loved each other."

"They must've married for some reason," Jonathan said.

Now taking aim Nancy said, "My mom was young. My dad was older,

but he had a cushy job, money, came from a good family. So they bought a nice house at the end of the cul-de-sac...and started their nuclear family."

Despite the quietness of her voice Jonathan sensed the lurking anger behind her words. Like a hidden fire.

"Screw that," he murmured.

"Yeah," she held the gun more firmly, bent her head slightly and closed one eye as she took aim at the middle can. "Screw that."

She fired the gun and with a loud *ping!* the bullet blasted the can off its stump. Nancy looked over at Jonathan in surprise, but he merely grinned back at her as if he had expected it all along.

---

Hopper sat on the floor leaning back against a wall in his living area. His place was still a disaster but he did not care. He held the phone to his ear and listened to the line ring as he waited for an answer. The article about Terry Ives lawsuit against Dr. Brenner lay on his coffee table. As he waited he fidgeted with a bright blue hair tie that he wore around his wrist.

"Hello?" a woman answered.

"Hey," he said.

"Jim?"

"Yeah," he confirmed.

"Why are you calling me here? I told you not to call me," said the woman wearily.

"I know, I know, I know. I just wanted to...I just wanted to hear your voice and, uh...I just wanted to say that, um..." he paused for a long moment his heart aching at the memory of everything he had lost. "Even after everything that happened, I don't...I don't regret any of it. And those seven years, they were...everything to me."

"Have you been drinking?" the woman asked him.

"No, no," he suddenly heard a baby crying in the background, and his ex-wife shushed her child.

"Ssh! Honey, hey...hey, it's okay, it's okay, ssh!"

The baby continued to cry and Hopper said, "You know what, actually, I have been drinking, I'm sorry."

"Jim, I can't..." she started.

"Just take care of yourself, okay? Say hi to Bill for me," he said dismissively.

"Are you sure-?"

But Hopper had hung up the phone before she could finish. He stood and grabbed his jacket, the article, and his gun. As he turned toward the front door the phone rang again. He picked up the housing and yanked the cord out of the wall before turning and exiting his trailer.

---

Mid-afternoon found Lucas and Dustin walking along the train tracks in the woods with Mike and Eleven following several paces behind.

"How much further?" whined Lucas.

Dustin who was staring down at his compass said, "I don't know. These only tell direction, not distance. You really need to learn more about compasses."

"I'm just saying. How do we know when we get to the gate?"

"Uh, I think a portal to another dimension's gonna be pretty obvious," Dustin snapped.

Lucas sighed and glanced back at Eleven who wiped at her nose. "Do you think she's acting weird?"

"You're asking if the weirdo is acting weird?"

"I mean, weirder than normal?" Lucas corrected, rolling his eyes.

Lucas glanced back at her again as Dustin said, "I don't know. Who cares?"

Behind them Eleven stalked silently beside Mike, breathing hard, her heart pounding in fear.

---

*Eleven sat atop her bed hugging her knees to her chest. She wore only her hospital gown.*

*"How far, Papa?" she asked as Papa sat on the edge of her bed a file in his hand and a large photo of a man inside.*

*"Farther than we've ever gone before," he told her. He turned to face her and showed her the image of the man in a suit holding a briefcase.*

*"The bath?" she asked.*

*"Yes. Yes, the bath."*

*He set the photo on the small table next to her bed. She watched him mutely. He paused then looked at her and asked, "Is that okay?"*

*She stared up at him. He had never asked her that before, and she wanted to say no, but she also wanted to please him. To make him happy with her so that he would be nice to her.*

*"Okay," she said.*

*In the underground lab Eleven followed a scientist up a set of metal stairs wearing a bathing suit with floaties in the chest pockets. Another scientist followed behind and she peered back at him before climbing up, nervous. The scientists stood by as she stepped forward and a man leaned down to place her crown of electrodes over her head.*

*Another man cranked open a large clear tank full of water by turning a wheel several times and then opening the heavy lid to the bubbling water inside. Stepping onto a hanging platform which they positioned over the water Eleven held onto the sides as they . Just before her knees were immersed in the fluid they placed a large helmet over her head the bottom of it resting on her shoulders. It had a window over the front so she could see out of it. The water was cold at first contact but not freezing.*

*Once the platform had reached the bottom she stepped off it. She could see Papa, distorted, outside of the bath. He held his hand up in greeting and she placed her palm against the glass of the container, the platform rose up behind her. One of the men outside of the bath rolled a large, curved metal door over the glass of the tank blocking her view of Papa.*

---

Eleven suddenly seized Mike's arm saying, "Mike."

"Yeah?" he asked curiously.

"Turn back," she told him.

"What? Why?" he frowned.

"I'm tired," she said.

"Look, I'm sure we're almost there. Just hold on a little longer, okay?" he turned back to his compass.

She stopped walking for a moment and peered back down at the track they had just walked before turning back and following Mike and his friends, fear and worry consuming her.

---

"You never said what I was saying," said Nancy as she and Jonathan walked through the woods. She now carried the gun, and he the bat.

"What?" he asked confused.

"Yesterday. You said I was saying something and that's why you took my picture," she reminded him.

His face suddenly flushed with heat again. "Oh,uh...I don't know. My guess..."

He hesitated trying to remember everything he had seen that night as he had seen her through the lens of his camera. "I saw this girl, you know, trying to be someone else. But for that moment...it was like you were alone, or you thought you were. And, you know, you could just be yourself."

"That is such bullshit," said Nancy slowly.

Jonathan paused and stammered, "Wh-what?"

"I am not trying to be someone else. Just because I'm dating Steve and you don't like him-" she accused.

Suddenly angry Jonathan stalked past her. "You know what? Forget it. I just thought it was a good picture."

"He's actually a good guy," she called after him.

"Okay," he snorted.

"Yesterday, with the camera...He's not like that at all. he was just being protective," she tried to explain.

"Yeah, that's one word for it."

"Oh, and I guess what you did was okay?"

"No I...I never said that," he turned back to her.

"He had every right to be pissed!" she said loudly.

"Okay, alright! Does that mean I have to like him?"

"No," she grumbled.

"Listen, don't take it so personally, okay? I don't like most people. He's in the vast majority," he pushed past her again.

Nancy was beginning to feel very upset with Jonathan but she wasn't sure why. "You know, I was actually starting to think that you were okay."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I was thinking, 'Jonathan Byers, maybe he's not the pretentious creep everyone says he is'," she said sarcastically.

"Well, I was just starting to think you were okay," he shot back at her and he paced over to where she stood.

"Oh," she said raising her eyebrows and crossing her arms.

"I was thinking, 'Nancy Wheeler, she's not just another suburban girl who thinks she's rebelling by doing exactly what every other suburban girl does...until that phase passes and they marry some boring one-time jock who now works sales, and they live out a perfectly boring little life at the end of a cul-de-sac. Exactly like their parents, who they thought were so depressing, but now, hey, they get it'."

He walked past her once again and she turned to stare after him, fuming. She wanted to say something hurtful back but nothing came to mind, so she merely scoffed and stomped after him.

---

As Joyce unraveled her lights someone hammered on her door.

"Go away, Lonnie," she hollered.

The knocking continued and she threw the lights down in anger, snatched the hammer from the table and stormed over to the door.

"Seriously! I am gonna mur-!"

She had opened the door to find Hopper standing there with his index finger over his lips and a paper held up with the words 'Don't say anything' written across it.

"What? What?" she whispered under her breath in alarm as he entered her house and closed the door. He stared wide-eyed at all the lights.

"Oh, Jesus," he sighed.

---

The boys and Eleven ambled through a junkyard when Dustin came to an abrupt stop.

"Oh no," he said.

"Oh no'. What's 'oh no'?" asked Lucas.



"We're headed back home," said Dustin.

"What?" snapped Mike.

Lucas asked, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Setting sun, right there," he gestured at the sun in the sky. "We looped right back around."

"And you're just realizing this now?" complained Lucas.

"Why is this all on me?" Dustin griped.

"Because you're the compass genius!" yelled Lucas.

"What do yours say?" asked Dustin.

Mike and Lucas both glanced at their compasses and simultaneously answered. "North."

"Makes no damn sense," said Dustin confused.

"Maybe the Gate moved," suggested Mike.

"No, I don't think it's the Gate. I-I think it's something else screwing with the compasses," Dustin speculated.

"Maybe it's something here," Mike said looking around, but Lucas turned to stare at Eleven instead.

"No, it has to be like a super magnet," Dustin explained.

"It's not a magnet," Lucas said pointing at Eleven. "She's been acting weirder than normal. If she can slam doors with her mind, she can definitely screw up a compass."

"Why would she do that?" asked Mike bewildered.

"Because she's trying to sabotage our mission. Because she's a traitor!" he yelled at her. He stalked over to her slowly.

"Lucas, what are you doing?" asked Mike.

"You did it, didn't you?" Lucas asked the trembling girl in a low voice.  
"You don't want us to reach the Gate. You don't want us to find Will."

"Lucas, come on, seriously, just leave her alone!" Mike shouted.

"Admit it," Lucas told her.

"No-" she began.

"Admit it!" Lucas yelled and Eleven flinched.

Lucas snatched her arm pulling it up to examine the sleeve of her jacket. He found wet, dark, red stains on the blue fabric.

"Fresh blood," he shoved her arm away. "I knew it."

"Lucas, come on!" yelled Mike.

"I saw her wiping her nose on the tracks! She was using her powers!" retorted Lucas.

"Bull! That's old blood! Right, El?" he looked to her but she didn't respond. Her face only screwed up in fear and she began to cry.  
"Right, El?"

"It's...not...it's not safe," she told them tearfully. Lucas shook his head angrily.

---

The multi-colored bulbs from the Christmas lights that Joyce had hung all over the inside of her house lay scattered on the table surfaces and the floor. Hopper unscrewed the last one and finding nothing he sat himself in a chair exhausted.

"Okay," he panted. "Should be okay. I mean...I can't guarantee it, but it should be okay."

"What the hell is going on Hopper?" Joyce asked him.

"They bugged my place," he said bluntly.

She stared wide-eyed and incredulous. "What?"

"They bugged my place. They put a microphone in the light," he took a deep breath then went on. "It's 'cause I'm on to them and they know it. I don't know..."

"Who?"

"I thought they might be watching you, too," Hopper shook his head as Joyce tried to get answers out of him. "I don't know, the CIA, the NSA, Department of Energy...I don't know."

Starting to feel as if she wasn't the only one going crazy, Joyce said, "You gotta explain this to me, 'cause I am not-"

"I went to the morgue last night, Joyce," Hopper looked straight into her eyes.

"What?" she gaped at him.

"It wasn't him," he said.

"What?" she gasped again.

"Will's body, it was a fake," he leaned forward holding her gaze as she knelt on the ground before him. "You were right. This whole time, you were right."

Joyce's lips trembled and her eyes closed as the sweet relief of someone finally believing her lifted some of the weight she had been carrying from her shoulders. Now she was not alone. Now they just might find Will.

---

"What did I tell you?" Lucas yelled at Mike. "She's been playing us from the beginning!"

"That's not true," denied Mike. "She helped us find Will!"

"Find Will? Find Will? Where is he, then? Huh? I don't see him," he circled around searching sarcastically for a boy he knew was not there.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Yeah, you know what I mean."

"No, I actually don't. Just think about it, Mike. She could've just told us where the Upside Down was right away," he gestured wildly at the noticeably fearful Eleven. "But she didn't. She just made us run around like headless chickens."

The two friends were becoming extremely irate and Dustin hurried forward to push the two apart.

"Alright, calm down!" he yelled at them, but Lucas slapped Dustin's arm away quite beside himself.

"No! She used us, all of us! She helped just enough so she could get what she wants. Food and a bed! She's like a stray dog."

"Screw you, Lucas!" Mike shouted furiously.

"No! Screw you, Mike. You're blind...blind because you like that a girl's not grossed out by you. But wake up, man! Wake the hell up!" he bellowed into Mike's face. "She knows where Will is, and now she's just letting him die in the Upside Down."

"Shut up!" screamed Mike.

"For all we know, it's her fault," Lucas gave Eleven a disgusted look.

"Shut up!"

"We're looking for some stupid monster..." Lucas continued and he actually gave Mike a small push. "But did you ever stop to think that maybe she's the monster?"

Lucas pointed at Eleven, but Mike had had enough.

"I said shut up!" he yelled and he wrapped his arm around Lucas' shoulders and tried to wrestle him to the ground. Lucas however, fought back and the two grappled violently with each other as Dustin shook his head in disgust and Eleven watched in horror.

"Stop!" she shouted.

"Knock it off, you idiots!" Dustin hollered, but the boys continued to fight and they soon fell to the ground trying to one up the other.

"Stop it!" Eleven screamed her heart pounding in her head. She had never seen a fight before. She feared Mike would be hurt.

"Mike, get off!" Dustin yelled.

"Stop it!" Eleven screamed again.

Yet, the fight went on and Lucas was finally able to draw back his arm to hit Mike. This proved to be too much for Eleven and her terror and anger burst from her in a bloodcurdling scream, which echoed throughout the junkyard. Lucas felt himself thrown back by some invisible force and he hit the ground before sliding roughly across the dirt and slamming into the side of a broken down vehicle. He did not get back up.

"Jesus!" exclaimed Dustin in alarm.

Struggling to his feet Mike chased after Dustin to check on Lucas.

"Lucas! Lucas! Lucas, are you all right? Lucas," Mike shook his friend trying to get him to wake up.

"Lucas, come on!" shouted Dustin.

"Lucas, wake up! Lucas," Mike called.

"Come on, Lucas!" Dustin continued trying to revive him with no luck.

Mike spun around to yell at Eleven. "Why would you do that? What is wrong with you? What is wrong with you?"

She only stood there sobbing at what she had done, worried that she had hurt Lucas beyond repair. Her nose was bleeding from the use of her powers.

---

*Water bubbled around Eleven. She had grown use to the temperature so that she was neither cold nor warm. The world was dark, empty. She closed her eyes and focused on the man she had seen in the photo. She could hear voices everywhere, and her heart thundered in her chest.*

*She opened her eyes and she was there in the blank, black world. She saw nothing, smelled nothing, but she could hear someone speaking. Turning she saw the man she was searching for. It was from him that the dialogue came but she did not understand the strange words he spoke. He was dressed in a long coat and a furry hat. She stepped near him and as she did she felt water under her feet. Each footfall made a quiet splash. Soon she stood before him, watching as he spoke the strange words. This was of no consequence to her. Many times she had heard Papa speaking to others, but unless he spoke slowly and used her words, she had a difficult time understanding him as well.*

*In the underground lab, Brenner and his scientists listened closely as a voice speaking in Russian came over the speaker system. Eleven was transmitting the man's confidential words into their lab.*

*Inside the void, Eleven paced before the man, trying to make out what he was saying. He sounded different from Papa. As she tried to decipher his words she suddenly heard something in the distance, although quite near her. It sounded like growling. She backed away in alarm, and the man faded away like smoke.*

*Brenner and the scientists listened closely as a strange snarling came over the speakers.*

*"What is that?" asked one of the men in the lab.*

*"I have no idea," Brenner responded as the snarling and growling continued.*

*In the void, Eleven breathed heavily as she backed away in fright. It grew louder and she quickly turned and ran away on the dark watery floor of her mental void.*

*In the tank, Eleven pounded the glass with both fists screaming hysterically, "Help! Help!"*

---

*Eleven wept, her nose still bleeding, as Dustin and Mike attempted to rouse Lucas.*

*"Come on, wake up. Come on!" yelled Dustin.*

Mike gave Lucas another shake. "Lucas...Lucas, come on!"

Finally, Lucas came to, feeling immensely groggy. Dustin actually chuckled in giddy relief and Mike exhaled the breath he had been holding.

"Lucas. Lucas, you okay?" Mike asked him as he sat up slowly.

"Lucas...Lucas, how many fingers am I holding up?" Dustin held up three fingers, but Lucas only cradled the back of his head with his hand. "Lucas, how many fingers?"

Mike reached out to his friend. "Let me see your head."

"Get off of me!" Lucas shoved Mike's hand away viciously.

"Jus...Lucas," Mike pleaded as Lucas struggled to his feet. "Lucas, let me see."

Lucas pushed him away and his voice cracked as he yelled, "Get off of me!"

Mike tried to follow after him, but Dustin held him back.

"Lucas, come on," called Mike.

"Let him go. Man, let him go," said Dustin.

Mike watched his friend storm off. How had they gotten here? How had things gone so wrong? He turned to look back at Eleven but found that she was no longer there.

"Where's El?" Mike asked Dustin, suddenly panicked. "El? El!"

"Eleven!" hollered Dustin.

"El! Eleven!"

"El!" Dustin called searching the area around them.

"Eleven!" called Mike into the evening, but if she was still near enough to hear she was refusing to answer.

---

In the woods night had fallen, and Nancy and Jonathan carried flashlights. They walked in silence until Nancy paused as she heard something nearby. Jonathan turned to see what the hold up was.

"What, are you tired?"

"Shut up," she snapped.

"What?" he asked with raised eyebrows.

Nancy answered very quietly. "I heard something."

They listened closely and nearby there came a soft whimpering. Following it with their flashlights they came across a bloody and dying deer lying on its side in misery.

"Oh, God," Nancy knelt beside the creature, staring in pity. She reached out to touch the animal gently. "It's been hit by a car. We can't just leave it."

She looked back at Jonathan who motioned at the gun in her hand. Though, she did not want to admit it, she knew the only way for its pain to cease was for its life to end. With a look of sadness and revulsion she brought the gun up slowly to aim at the deer. Her face screwed up in discomfort and grief for the innocent animal and she found that pulling the trigger this time around was not going to be as easy as shooting a can had been.

Jonathan held his hand out for the gun. "I'll do it."

"I thought you said-?" she began, but Jonathan cut her off.

"I'm not nine anymore," he took the gun and they both stood staring down at the deer.

Nancy held the flashlight so Jonathan could see what he was doing. He aimed at the head and cocked the gun. As he prepared to fire he could not help listening to it whimper. Thoughts of that rabbit his father made him kill came to mind and he felt slightly ashamed at the burn in his eyes. Just as his finger began to twitch over the trigger the deer was suddenly dragged from view and he and Nancy leapt back in shock.



"What was that?" asked Nancy wildly.

Shining the light across the leaves they followed the trail of blood left by the deer, constantly searching all around them for any sign of well...anything. However, the blood trail soon came to an abrupt end.

"Where'd it go?" asked Nancy confused.

"I don't know. Do you see anymore blood?" Jonathan questioned her. The hairs on the back of his neck were standing on end. Something was not right.

"No," she answered.

They circled around each other, Jonathan looking through the trees for signs of movements, Nancy searching the ground for hints of blood or the deer itself. Stepping a few paces away from Jonathan, Nancy noticed a hollow in a tree with something dripping from it. Thinking it must be blood from the deer she knelt down closer for a look, dropping the bat on the ground. Inside the hollow leaves were covered in blood but the dripping fluid appeared to be something else entirely. It looked slimy and similar in quality to mucous. But looking inside she sensed that it led somewhere and somehow she did not think it was the other side of the tree.

"Jonathan?" she called looking around for him.

However, he was nowhere in sight, and she figured he was still searching for the deer. She glanced back at the tree hesitating. It was such a bad idea, but would she be able to find the tree again? She thought about Barb and Will. Maybe whatever was inside this hollow held answers.

Quickly removing her backpack Nancy tossed it behind her then leaned low and began to crawl into the tree. The slime was undeniably gross and the weblike substance which she shoved past was tougher than she had expected. Coming to the end of the small tunnel she stood up her flashlight flickering as she did. She peered around her.

Nancy saw that though she was in a forest it was not the same forest

she had just left. Everything here was dead and there were particles floating on the stiff air. She stepped forward her breathing growing heavy, her hair wet with slime, and she touched the trunk of a dead tree. It felt flaky and cold. It did not appear as if there were a living thing anywhere and the place was oddly eerie.

As she inched forward investigating the strange place her flashlight continued to flicker erratically. She gave it a couple thumps hoping to make it stop, but she spun around upon hearing a loud snarl. What she saw next was most certainly the most frightening image she had seen in this place yet. It was the most frightening image she had ever seen in her life.

A strange creature knelt over something on the ground apparently feeding. The creature was pale as if it had never seen the sun, and hunched with a humanoid body but its movements were far more animalistic. Its arms were overly large as it held onto its prey gorging itself with snarling breaths. Nancy crept backward very slowly, cringing in terror at the sight. Her flashlight flickered on and off, but the beast took no notice.

Suddenly her foot stepped onto a dead branch that crackled loudly as it caved in. The noise broke the creature's focus on its meal and it spun around roaring at her. When it did its face literally opened up like the petals of a flower, except the lining of the membrane inside its face were covered with hundreds of razor-sharp teeth. Dropping the flashlight in horror Nancy screamed and ran in the opposite direction.

In the woods on the other side Jonathan heard a distant scream.

"Nancy!" he hollered. He ran back toward where he had last seen her and found her bag and the bat. He picked up the bag and looked around at the trees. "Nancy? Nancy? Nancy, where are you? Nancy!"

He ran off past the tree with the hollow calling out, "Nancy!"

Unnoticed by Jonathan the bark of the tree in which Nancy had crawled through began to seal over the hollow opening.

## **7. Chapter 6 - The Monster**

### **Chapter Six - The Monster**

"Nancy! Nancy! Come on, come on! Nancy!"

Jonathan stumbled through the dark woods, panting as he searched for Nancy. Panic bubbled inside him as the beam from his flashlight fell over tree after tree but no girl, no deer, and no monster.

"Where are you?" he shouted.

A scared voice echoed through the woods as it screamed. "Jonathan! Jonathan!"

Nancy ran through the dead forest searching for the slimy tree she had crawled into, but each tree looked the same as the one before.

"Jonathan! Jonathan, I'm right here!"

"Nancy! Nancy! Come on!" Jonathan called out in frustration. He could hear her so she must be near, but still there was no sign of her.

"Jonathan, where are you? Jonathan!" Nancy paused, trying to catch her breath, and stared around at the bases of the trees looking for that hollow, but it was no where to be seen. "Jonathan!"

She turned, her whole body trembling. "Jonathan, I'm right...I'm right here!"

Like a voice coming through a long tunnel Jonathan heard Nancy calling for him.

"I'm right here!" he yelled.

She shouted again. "Jonathan!"

It was almost as if they were running circles around each other. Jonathan stopped running and called, "I'm right here! Nancy! Just follow my voice!"

Over the pounding of her heart Nancy could hear him. Huffing she ran in the direction where she thought his voice was echoing from. "Jonathan!"

"Follow my voice, Nancy, I'm right here!" came his distant shout, although it seemed much closer.

She slowed down trying to discern where to go, but then she turned to her left and her eyes fell on the grotesque silhouette of the monster. With a growl it turned towards her and she screamed as she ran in the opposite direction.

"Nancy!" Jonathan ran after the sound of the small scream and suddenly he came across the tree with the slimy hollow.

In the dead forest, Nancy hid behind a cold, damp tree frightened in a way she had never been before. Would she die here? Would that thing eat her as it had the deer?

Jonathan approached the tree cautiously. It appeared to have some sort of hole in it. Remembering his mother had said that the monster came into the house through the wall Jonathan wondered if this hollow lead to some other place beyond the tree. Beyond their world. Had it come through here? Did it take Nancy there?

Nancy tried to quiet her breath as she listened to the nearby growling. Closing her mouth, lips sealed tight, she held her shuddering breath. Her whole body shook in terror. She could almost feel the creature moving on the other side of the tree. She knew if it found her there would be no escape. Thin as it was she could sense its power and strength. It was a predator and she was its prey.

Jonathan leaned low peering inside the hollow observing the strange gooey substance. The tree creaked and swayed.

"Nancy?" he called quietly. "Nancy."

Nancy's back was pressed into the tree that was her hiding spot as if she might meld into it and become the tree itself. Her ears seemed to pick up every sound around her from the whisper of the stale air, her heart, the strange lifeless pulse around her, but then came a far

friendlier sound. The sound of Jonathan's voice so near.

"Nancy! Follow my voice!"

Looking to her right she saw the hollow at the base of a tree several feet from her. But the growling creature still hunted her and she searched around her for it. She could not see it anywhere. If she moved from this spot would it see? Would it get her before she even made it to the tree? How fast could it move anyways? Was there someway to distract it? Nancy was torn over what to do. Stay or go?

Jonathan leaned closer to the hollow. He felt extremely concerned as she hadn't called out for awhile. "Nancy?"

Whatever filled the hollow had a pulse and seemed to breathe. What was it? Suddenly something burst out of it and Jonathan leapt back, falling onto his backside. However, a moment later he realized it was a human hand.

"Jonathan!" yelled Nancy.

"Nancy!" he hollered back and he seized her hand and pulled. Struggling with the aid of Jonathan, Nancy strained her way back through the slimy webbing. With a great heave Jonathan pulled her free from the hollow and they collapsed onto the forest ground, Nancy laying across his body and sobbing.

Using his feet to push himself and her away from the tree, Jonathan sat up as Nancy's trembling form clung to him.

"I got you," he panted as he wrapped his arms around her and watched as the bark of the tree sealed over the hollow like a door closing to a room they should have never seen.

---

Later that night Steve drove his car down a suburban road, Tommy sitting beside him as Carol hung out in the backseat.

"I just don't understand why we're coming out here," whined Carol. "She obviously doesn't want to talk to you."

"That's...that's not it," Steve said, annoyed.

"Oh, really? Because no girl would ever blow off King Steve," she mocked as Tommy snickered.

"She was acting weird. I mean, something was wrong," he corrected before Carol could come up with something stupid to say.

"So what?" Carol scoffed. "Like, you're worried about her?"

"What?" Steve snapped. He meant for it to sound biting, like he couldn't believe she would think that of him, but it came out soft as if he couldn't believe she had figured it out.

"Aw, you are," she cooed loudly. She leaned in from the back and rubbed circles over his chest. "Aw, Steve has a heart!"

"Would you just-stop," Steve griped.

"Oh, Stevey's in love!" Tommy piped up teasingly.

"Would you just shut up?" Steve said beginning to feel pissed off.

"Who knew?" asked Carol.

"Shut up!" Steve yelled and Carol flinched at the sudden anger in his voice.

Tommy chuckled. "Jeez."

"Damn," Carol's eyes flickered between Steve and Tommy. "Sorry."

"So this is it, huh? Princess' castle," said Tommy as Steve pulled over on the side of the curb of a cul-de-sac.

"I'll just be a minute."

Steve hopped out of the car and shut the door. Then he jogged across the Wheeler's lawn to the house. Hopping up onto a utility box he stealthily pulled himself onto the lower setting roof. Staying low he peered into Nancy's window ready to tap it so she could let him in. But with a jolt he saw that she was not alone. She was sitting on the edge of her bed, facing away from the window, and Jonathan Byers sat beside her. Steve watched as Jonathan extended an arm around

her shoulders in an embrace, and fury filled him at the sight of this lowly betrayal.

---

Articles about Hawkins Lab, Dr. Martin Brenner, and Terry Ives lay across Joyce's coffee table as she and Hopper sat in the kitchen and discussed everything he had discovered.

"Look, we gotta go through this again," Joyce said.

"I told you everything that I saw," Hopper grunted wearily.

"Oh, gosh. Tell me again," she insisted.

"Upstairs or downstairs?"

"Upstairs," she decided. It was clear that whatever was downstairs was far more difficult to understand so beginning with something that felt more human seemed like the right place to start. She brought her cigarette back to her lips as she watched Hopper from across her kitchen table.

"There was a laboratory. It was where they must do experiments or something, and then there was..." He inhaled trying to picture the details. "There was this kid's room."

"How do you know it was a kid's room?" asked Joyce, frowning.

"More like a prison," Hopper commented with steel in his voice.

"So why would you think it was a kid's room, then?" Joyce questioned him.

"Because, I told you, the size of the bed, there was a drawing, there was a stuffed animal-"

"You d-didn't say there was a drawing," her eyes were big and round, eyebrows raised in alarm at this news.

"Yeah, there was a drawing of a...an adult and a child. It said 'eleven' on it," Hopper explained, confused at her interest.

"Was it good?"

"It was a kid's drawing, Joyce," Hopper griped. "It was stick figures."

With an exhale Joyce hurried over to a counter cluttered with papers and photos and she pulled out a sheet of paper. Turning back to the table she slammed it onto the wooden surface before him. Hopper stared down at a detailed crayon drawing, no stick figures in sight.

"Wasn't Will," Joyce declared confidently.

Hopper stared at Joyce appalled but she merely shrugged. Then he looked toward the coffee table in her living room. Snuffing out his cigarette in an ashtray he rose from his chair.

"Earl..." he said slowly. "The night that Benny died, Earl said he saw some kid with a shaved head with Benny."

Hopper leaned over the small table peering at the scattered articles. He sat on the couch as Joyce joined him searching the news clippings as well.

"Now, I pressed him, he said it might be Will, but maybe..." he rummaged through the reports.

"Wait...Maybe, it wasn't?" asked Joyce.

Hopper pulled out the article he had been searching for. "Look...this woman, Terry Ives, she claims to have lost her daughter, Jane. She sued Brenner, she sued the government...Now, the claims came to nothing, but what if..."

Dawning realization hit him like a pile of bricks as the images of Brenner and his patients, the scrap of hospital gown found at the end of a drainpipe leading out of Hawkins Lab, the kid stealing food from Benny all passed through his mind.

"I mean, what if this whole time I've been...I've been looking for Will...I've been chasing after some other kid?"

Hopper looked to Joyce for confirmation of what he knew already to be true. Amazingly, in his search for one missing kid he had stumbled



over another.

Jane.

---

Nancy showered off the dirt, slime and grime from her face, hair and body. But the images of the night's horrors were not so easily washed away. They flashed through her mind as if they were still happening. As if she were transported back to that forest. The dying deer was yanked away. She pressed her hands over her eyes trying to banish the memory, but the growling creature was branded in her mind as was the feeling of fleeing from it, sure it would catch her.

She ran her hands over her head as the echo of Jonathan calling her name still rang in her ears. She could see the creature feeding on the deer, the sight of the dead trees flashing past as she ran through them, lost in a lifeless world with floating flurries. Stepping on that decayed branch. The roar of a creature with head filled with endless rows of teeth.

She panted trying to pull herself together but she felt as if she were falling apart as it all hit her. That monster. That place. Barb and Will. How could they possibly be alive?

In Nancy's room Jonathan rolled a flowery sleeping bag out onto the floor next to the bed. Nancy came in the room now clean and in her pajamas. He looked up at her as she quietly closed the door and gazed at him.

"Better?" he asked.

She nodded slowly still looking a little upset. "Yeah."

She looked down at the blanket.

"Is this okay?" Jonathan stood feeling awkward as he had not asked her if she wanted him to go. "Uh, I found it in the closet. I can go home. I-I just figured..."

"Yeah, no, I...I...I don't wanna be alone," she admitted feeling awkward herself. "Do you?"

"No. uh...no," he confessed.

Strangely feeling nervous along with her now steady fear and anxiety Nancy crawled into bed as Jonathan slid into the sleeping bag. Jonathan grabbed Lonnie's gun and held it to his chest, determined not to let it out of his sight ever again. He stared up at Nancy's ceiling his head on one of her crocheted pillows.

Nancy lay under her covers feeling vulnerable, scared, and uncertain. She hesitated but then asked, throwing caution to the winds. "Can you just come up here?"

Nerves hitting him like a truck, Jonathan silently slid out from the sleeping bag.

"Yeah," he said. He slid the gun under one of her pillows and slowly got onto the bed beside her, laying atop the covers. After a moment he asked, "Do you want the lights off, or-?"

"On," Nancy responded firmly.

"Yeah," he answered. He wanted to say something to comfort her, to make her feel better. Safer. "You know, it...it can't get us in here."

"We don't know that," Nancy responded as she thought of that monster.

Jonathan turned to lay on his side facing her, and they lay there silently waiting for sleep to overtake them, but too afraid to close their eyes.

---

The next morning Mike sat alone in his family's basement, fiddling with his Rubix cube. He glanced over at the door leading outside and then at the hut he had made for Eleven, which sat there abandoned. He had waited for her to come back all night, but she had not returned. Tossing the cube onto the couch he stomped over to the tent. Angry and frustrated he threw one of the chairs aside, yanked the blanket to the floor, and kicked the pillows and cushions over and over again.

Tears stung his eyes as he thought of Eleven messing up their

compasses, and Lucas calling her a monster. Dustin yelling over his fight with Lucas, and Eleven's scream as she flung Lucas through the air. Wiped out Mike stared down at the mess he had made of Eleven's tent.

---

"Uh, yes, it's Ives. Terry Ives. That's with a "Y". Yeah, I got a pen. Hang on," Hopper held the payphone he was speaking into with his shoulder as he pulled a pen from his jacket and began scribbling on his palm. "Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm. Great, thanks. I really appreciate this, Frank. Say hi to the boys for me, too, would you?"

He hung up and exited the phone box. He tossed his cigarette to the ground and climbed back into the driver's seat of Joyce's car which he had parked on the side of a country road.

"Did you get it?" asked Joyce anxiously.

Hopper nodded. "I got it."

"Okay," she breathed in relief and Hopper threw the car into drive and sped off down the road.

---

Stirred from sleep, Jonathan opened his eyes. Momentarily confused at where he was he stared at Nancy's nightstand before remembering the night's events. Looking over he saw Nancy sitting up on the bed as she turned the pages of a book, apparently doing homework or something.

"Oh...hey," he said sleepily, sitting up.

"Hey," she responded as she jotted down notes.

"Couldn't sleep?" he asked as he noted the shadows under her eyes.

She shook her head.

"Every time I close my eyes, I just...keep seeing that...thing. Wherever I was, that place...I think that it lives there. It was feeding there. Feeding on that deer. That means that if...if Will and Barbara..." her voice trailed off unable to continue the awful thought.

Jonathan scooted closer to her. "Hey. My mom said she talked to Will. If he's alive, there's a chance Barbara is, too."

Nancy was not comforted. "But that means that she's trapped...in that place. We have to find it again."

"You wanna go back out there?" he asked half-incredulous.

"Maybe we don't have to," she said quickly. "When I saw it, it was feeding on that deer. Meaning it's...it's a predator, right?"

"Right."

"And it seems to hunt at night, like a...a lion or a coyote," she pointed at the book she had been reading from and Jonathan realized it was book about animals, specifically predators. "But it doesn't hunt in packs like them. It's always alone, like...like a bear. And remember at Steve's, when Barb cut herself?"

She was watching him and Jonathan nodded, still half-embarrassed that he could confirm this due to spying on them. But Nancy no longer seemed to care as she continued, "And then, last night, the deer..."

"Hmm, it was bleeding, too," he nodded again finally seeing where she was headed. She pulled out another book.

"One sec," She opened to a bookmarked page and pointed at one of the images. "Sharks can detect blood in one part per 's one drop of blood in a million, and they can smell it from a quarter mile away."

"So you're saying it can detect blood?" asked Jonathan.

"It's just a theory," Nancy admitted.

"We could test it," he suggested, and she nodded slowly. "But if it works..."

"At least we'll know it's coming," she whispered. They gazed silently at one another then the door to her bedroom rattled, and they both gasped. Jonathan grasped her hand.

"Honey, are you up?" Karen asked from the hall.

Nancy sighed, breathless, and thanked the gods she had locked the door. She called back, "Yeah, I'm...I'm getting dressed."

"I, uh, made some blueberry pancakes," Karen told her.

"I'll be down in a second," Nancy answered. She listened to the sounds of her mother walking away, then she stared down at Jonathan's hand holding hers. He quickly let go.

"Your mom doesn't knock?" he asked her with a smirk, and they chuckled at their own jumpiness.

---

Connie Frazier knocked confidently on the pale blue door of the modest home. A short moment later it opened and the owner stared at her with inquisitive eyes.

Putting on her brightest smile she greeted him pleasantly. "Hi. Scott Clarke?"

Scott smiled in returned and answered, "Uh, yes?"

"The same Scott Clarke who teaches science and AV at Hawkins Middle?" she double-checked.

"The very same."

"Oh, wonderful," said Connie, as if having met him just made her day.

Minutes later, Connie and Scott sat conversing in the sitting room. To Connie's great annoyance Scott had wasted precious minutes with offers of food and beverages and small talk. She never understood people's desire for pleasantries. She came here with a purpose and she would rather have gotten straight to it than waste time. However, she smiled winningly and politely declined the offers.

Presently she held out the pamphlet that Brenner had had made for this particular cover story. It read "The Indiana AV club" and she was saying, "...and we're making a newsletter, which we'll send out monthly. It'll showcase all the latest equipment, as well as how-to

articles, which the kids write themselves."

Scott, who had taken the pamphlet enthusiastically grinned happily, "Oh, that's neat."

"What we're really trying to do here, Mr. Clarke-"

"Oh, please, call me Scott," he interrupted.

Irritation flashed hotly through her but she continued, her face never changing from the cordial mask she wore. "Scott. What we're trying to do here, Scott, is to connect kids from all over the state and give them the support and encouragement to pursue careers in technology. We feel these are the kinds of kids that are going to make Indiana proud."

Scott nodded, "I agree, yes. Completely."

"So, you know any kids you think might wanna participate?" Connie asked, pleased with how easily she could manipulate this dim-witted fool.

"Oh, I have a few in mind," Scott affirmed, pleased to think that he would have something to tell the boys that might cheer them up.

---

Dustin cruised quickly down the cul-de-sac to Mike's house eager to see if Eleven had come back during the night. But one look at Mike and he realized she had not.

"I just...I can't believe she didn't come back," said Mike, somewhat dumb-founded.

"She's gotta be close," Dustin assured him.

"She said it wasn't safe. She just messed up the compasses because she wanted to protect us. She didn't betray us," Mike ranted wildly. He had gone over yesterday's events for hours and realized (too late) that she was merely trying to keep them safe. It was he that had betrayed her and he despised himself for it.

"Mike, calm down," Dustin urged.

"I shouldn't have yelled at her. I never should've done that," Mike stated and another wave of shame washed over him.

"Mike, this isn't your fault."

"Yeah, it's Lucas," Mike blamed. It made him feel a little better to point the finger at someone else although he could not quite erase that horrible feeling of shame at the way he had yelled at El.

"It wasn't his fault, either," Dustin countered.

"It wasn't his fault?" Mike's incessant pacing came to a halt and he faced Dustin with a frown.

"No."

"So you're saying he wasn't way out of line?"

"Totally, but so were you!" Dustin accused and despite how often Mike had told himself he was to blame he couldn't help feeling defensive.

"What?"

"And so was Eleven," Dustin added.

"Oh, give me a break!" Mike snorted.

Dustin however, apparently had enough and stepping forward he yelled, "No, Mike, you give me a break! All three of you were being a bunch of little assholes! I was the only reasonable one. But the bottom line is... you pushed first. And you know the rule. You draw first blood..."

Mike back stepped with a look of disgust. "No! No way! I'm not shaking his hand!"

"You're shaking his hand!" Dustin said threateningly.

"No, I'm not."

"This isn't a discussion. This is the rule of law. Obey or be banished

from the party. Do you wanna be banished?"

"No," Mike admitted grudgingly.

"Good," he said, and hastily turned to retrieve his jacket.

"Where are we going?"

"Where do you think? We're going to get Lucas," he answered as he pulled his arms through his jacket sleeves. Then he tossed Mike his backpack. "And then we're gonna find Eleven."

---

*Eleven jolted from sleep as the loud, opening of her room's heavy, metal door opened. The lights came on and her breathing quickened with anxiety as her eyes adjusted to the sudden brightness. Sitting up she turned to face Papa as he came into her room, his arm behind his back. Peering down at her from beside the bed, Papa bent low and then showed her what he was holding in his hand. It was a small flower pot with purple flowers growing out of the dirt.*

*He held it out to her and she took it curiously as he sat on the edge of her bed saying, "Today is a very special day."*

*Eleven did not respond, but merely petted the flowers, feeling the soft texture of the plant against her fingertips.*

"Do you know why?"

*Now that he had asked a question she knew he would demand an answer so she glanced up at him and shook her head.*

*"Because today, we make history. Today, we make contact," Papa said softly, and reaching to her he tapped her nose gently with his index finger, Eleven's eyes crossing as she kept his hand in sight.*

---

Eleven came to with a start. Sitting up from her bed of leaves she peered at the woods around her. Birds chirped their morning greetings as she walked through the trees, her wig of yellow hair gripped tightly in her hand. Coming to the edge of a marsh Eleven used the watery mirror to watch as she carefully but the wig back



onto her head. The effect was not the same as it had been when Mike had helped her with it. It looked silly and messy and she yanked it off in frustration. She wanted to look pretty again, like the girl in the photo at Mike's house, but it just wasn't possible. Monsters were not pretty. As Eleven stared at herself in the water, hate for what she saw there bubbled to the surface until it erupted from her in a scream of fury and power. Energy raced across the water disrupting the serene surface, and the birds flocked away from their trees in search of a safer haven..

---

Karen cut apart a blueberry pancake, and stabbing one piece with her fork she held it out to Holly, saying, "Here you go."

Holly opened her mouth wide and Karen pushed the pancake inside.

"Ah...yum," she said as she watched the girl close her mouth and chew the food. She waited for the swallow but it didn't come. "Okay. Now, sweetie, swallow the pancake."

"Where is Nancy?" Ted drawled suddenly. "I thought she was coming down."

"She is. Uh, she was. I don't know," Karen sighed wearily.

Walking up the stairs, she called out, "Nancy, what's taking so long?"

She could hear music playing loudly from her daughter's room, but she did not answer.\

"Nancy?" She tried to open the door but found that it was locked. "Nancy, come on."

The music continued but still Nancy remained silent. Pulling a bobby pin from her hair, Karen used it to pick the lock. When she had successfully opened the door she entered the room.

"Nan-" she began, but she found that the room was deserted, the bed unmade with books scattered open across its surface, and a sleeping bag and pillow stretched out on the floor. Apparently someone had spent the night.

But who? Karen wondered in agitation.

---

Mike and Dustin rode their bikes up the driveway of a neat, blue house, the latter eager to get Lucas and set off on their journey, the former dreading having to admit his part in their fight. They rang the doorbell and waited until the Lucas answered the door. He stood morosely before them glaring first at Mike, then Dustin.

Once again turning his gaze to Mike he spat out, "What do you want?"

When Mike failed to answer Dustin slapped him and gave him a "Just do it," kind of look.

With a deep, reluctant sigh Mike said, "I drew first blood, so..." and he stuck out his hand at which Lucas stared incredulously before glancing back up at him.

In the Sinclair's living room Lucas paced as Mike and Dustin awaited his verdict. Coming up short Lucas turned and announced, "Okay, I'll shake."

Dustin grinned joyfully and Mike thrust out his hand but Lucas continued, "On one condition. We forget the weirdo and go straight to the gate."

Mike dropped his arm. "Then the deal's off!"

"Fine!" yelled Lucas.

"Fine!" Mike retorted.

"No, no, not fine! Guys, seriously?" Dustin sighed in annoyance. He grabbed at Mike, forcing him to face him. "Do you even remember what happened on the Bloodstone Pass?"

Mike traded looks with Lucas but found him as clueless as he felt so Mike shrugged. Dustin stared appalled at his two friends.

"We couldn't agree on what path to take, so we split up the party and those trolls took us out one by one. And it all went to shit. And we

were all disabled!" Dustin spouted. "So we stick together, no matter what!"

"Yeah, I agree," nodded Lucas. "But this is the party, right here in this room."

"El, is one of us now," Mike said.

"Um, no, she's not. Not even close! Never will be! She's a liar, a traitor-" Lucas began counting off her offenses on his fingers, but Mike cut across him, desperate to make him understand Eleven the way he had come to know her.

"She was just trying to keep us safe! She didn't mean to hurt you. It was an accident!"

"An accident?" Lucas repeated in disgust the still aching knot on his head giving a particularly nasty throb..

Again, Dustin acted as mediator. "All right, accident or not...admit it, it was a little awesome."

Lucas was irate. "Awesome?"

"Yeah, she threw you in the air with her mind!" Dustin pointed out ecstatically.

"I could have been killed!" Lucas reiterated.

"Which is exactly why we need her," Mike said surprising both Lucas and Dustin. "She's a weapon! Do you seriously wanna fight the demogorgon with your wrist rocket? That's like R2-D2 going to fight Darth Vader. We're no use to Will if we're dead."

"If you two wanna waste your time looking for a traitor, go ahead," Lucas said angrily. "Cause I'm not spending my time on her anymore. No way! I'm going to the gate. I'm gonna find Will."

He shoved them aside as he stalked between them and disappeared to his room, his friends staring helplessly after him.

---

Eleven walked slowly across the pavement as she watched people coming in and out of a large building. Several cars were parked out front and some of the people pushed around baskets on wheels. The baskets pushed out of the building usually had items in them whereas the ones pushed into the building did not yet carry anything. Feeling nervous Eleven worked up the courage to enter the structure. Her rumbling stomach fortified her resolve and she stepped up on the doors which slip open on their own.

She heard music playing softly from somewhere as she entered and the people inside the store gave her shocked and quizzical stares as she paced past them. Eleven was not aware how she appeared to them, a strange girl with a shaved head and dirt plastered to her face and dress, and dry blood under her nose. Rather she felt they saw what she saw in that marshy water. A monster and it made her feel all the worse. But she swallowed her discomfort and shame and ignored them as her eyes roamed the shelves for food. She could not however block her ears from the indistinct chatter of the men and women and suddenly she could hear Papa.

---

*"It's okay, Eleven. Don't be frightened. These are all friends," Papa held her hand as she clung closely to him. People filled the room, more than she had ever seen in one place before and they all watched her closely. "They're just here to watch. Don't focus on them. Stay in here."*

*Papa tapped her forehead. "Like before."*

*"Yes, Papa," Eleven answered bravely.*

*Once again the large water tank was opened, and as they put the electrode crown over her head Papa crouched to her level. "Now, remember. Whatever it is, it can't hurt you. Not from here. So there's nothing to be frightened of."*

*He ushered her to the platform over the water. Her limbs began to quiver in fear.*

*"It's reaching out to you... 'cause it wants you. Hmm? It's calling you... so don't turn away from it this time. I want you to find it. Understand?" Papa instructed her slowly determined for her to understand. She could*

*not run away.*

*Wanting to please Papa and make him proud Eleven said, "Yes."*

*However, as the platform descended and she watched him slide away as she was lowered into the water terror flooded her. It seemed to wash over her like the water did as first her feet entered the water, then her torso and lastly her head, on which the men had placed the bulky helmet. She stepped off the platform once in the tank and she peered at all the men as one shut the door over the tank closing her in. Once again she stood alone in the blank nothingness, no sound, nothing to see.*

---

"Are you lost?"

Eleven turned to see a tall middle-aged man addressing her. He stepped a little closer and asked gingerly, "Is your mom here?"

Eleven looked him up and down but did not offer a response.

"Your dad?"

Making up her mind about the man Eleven intoned, "Mouth breather." and turned away dismissively. The manager frowned after her, flabbergasted. She walked a short ways down an aisle peering through the glass of the freezers before her eyes landed on several boxes of Eggo waffles. She immediately opened the door and began to fill her arms with as many boxes as she could carry.

"What should we do?" one of the employees asked her manager as they watched the strange girl.

"Uh...Call the police," the manager responded uncertainly. Suddenly, Eleven stalked past him with several boxes of waffles clutched to her chest. She made a beeline for the exit.

"Excuse me," the manager started after her. "Young lady! You know you have to pay for those!"

The manager meant to give chase but a woman came out from another aisle and she gave a startled cry as her cart jerked forward, dragging her with it. The cart blocked the man's path to Eleven and

he quickly shoved it aside as he hollered after her.

"You - you have to pay for those! Stop right there! Thief! Thief!" His path cleared, he once again made to run at her but as she exited the store the sliding doors of the entrance slid close with such force that the glass shattered to hundreds of jagged pieces. Passersby shrieked in alarm and Eleven marched away with her boxes of waffles without so much as a backward glance.

---

Hopper and Joyce pulled up a long, gravel driveway before stepping out onto the unkempt property of Terry Ives. Hopper knocked on the front door and waited with an anxious Joyce. A woman pulled aside the curtain on the door and peered out at them through the window. They waved in greeting and she opened the door.

"Can I help you?" she asked with a mistrustful gaze.

"Hi," Hopper said. "We're looking for Terry Ives. Does she live here?"

"Who's asking?" the woman questioned skeptically.

"The Hawkins chief of police," he answered and he displayed his badge.

"And you want to talk to my sister?"

"Well, if your sister's Terry Ives, then, yeah, we do."

The woman shrugged cynically. "Okay, well, you can come in but if you want Terry to tell you anything, you're about five years too late."

She led them into a room where a TV set ran quietly. A beautiful, vacant looking woman sat in a rocking chair wearing a nightgown and robe. Though she faced the television set she seemed to stare past it.

"Terry, you have some visitors," said their hostess.

Joyce stepped forward and greeted Terry. "Hello. My name's Joyce Byers. Uh, this is Hopper. We drove over from Hawkins. Um, you see, uh, my son...he's been missing for almost a week now, and, um, we

were wondering if we could talk to you about your daughter, Jane? If there's anything that you could tell us about when she was taken..."

Terry sat rocking idly and did not answer.

"What was your relationship with Dr. Brenner?" asked Hopper. "You guys keep in touch?"

Again, she remained silent. In fact, she gave no outward sign that she even knew they were there, let alone talking to her. Joyce edged closer and held out one of the missing posters she had made and pointed out Will's photo.

"This is, uh...this is him. This is Will. Uh, you may have seen him on...on the news. Uh..."

"What's wrong with her?" Hopper asked Terry's sister in a low voice.

"I told you, you're wasting your time," was her answer.

---

Lucas was determined to be prepared for anything that awaited him on his mission. He carefully packed his backpack with every essential item he could think of including his binoculars, a hammer, his wrist rocket, and flashlight. He pulled the utility belt his dad had bought him for his birthday around his waist then tied a camouflage bandana around his head. When he deemed himself ready he donned his backpack and walked his bike to the end of his driveway.

That was when he looked up and noticed a utility man in a blue jumpsuit across the street, climbing out from a white Hawkins power and light van. Lucas paused nervously wondering if the man would ridicule him, but he simply held his hand up in a greeting and Lucas waved back. The man closed the driver's door and went about his business. Lucas hopped onto his bike and sped off down the road.

---

A few miles away Dustin and Mike rode their bikes down another street keeping pace with one another.

"This is weird without Lucas," Dustin fretted as he contemplated how their party of four had now whittled down to two.

"He should've shaken my hand," Mike said.

"He's just jealous," said Dustin wisely.

"What are you talking about?"

Dustin sighed and shook his head. "Sometimes, your total obliviousness just blows my mind."

When Mike's clueless expression persisted Dustin asked, "He's your best friend, right?"

"Yeah..." confirmed Mike, but he hesitated realizing how that sounded and added, "I mean, I don't know."

"It's fine," huffed Dustin. "I get it. I didn't get here until the fourth grade. He had the advantage of living next door. But none of that matters. What matters is that he is your best friend. And then this girl shows up and starts living in your basement, and all you ever want to do is pay attention to her."

"That's not true," Mike denied.

"Yes, it is," Dustin said again. "And you know it. And he knows it. But no one ever says anything until you both start punching and yelling at each other like goblins with intelligence scores of zero. Now everything's weird."

But his diverted attention was not what Mike was denying, and he felt somehow that it was critical he set the record straight.

"He's not my best friend," Mike said.

Dustin chuckled and said sarcastically, "Yeah, right."

Mike twitched his head as he tried to explain himself. "I mean, he is, but so are you. And so is Will."

"Can't have more than one best friend."

"Says who?"



"Says logic."

"Well, I call bull on your logic, because you're my best friend, too," Mike proclaimed firmly.

Dustin smiled and he suddenly felt much happier. "Okay."

Glancing off to the left the boys noticed several people milling about in front of the grocery store. They skidded to a stop.

"Whoa," muttered Mike as he watched Officers Powell and Callahan interview two of the employees. Looking around he realized the sliding doors were shattered and glass lay broken over the pavement.

"You don't think..." suggested Dustin.

"Uh...definitely," agreed Mike, and they remounted their bikes and rode on past the store.

---

Applause erupted on the TV as Hopper and Joyce sat around the kitchen table conversing with Terry's sister, Becky.

"She was a part of some study in college," she was explaining.

"MK Ultra?" asked Hopper.

"Yeah, that's the one," Becky nodded. "Was, uh, started in the '50s. By the time Terry got involved, it was supposed to be ramping down, but the drugs just got crazier. Messed her up good."

"This was the CIA that ran this?" Hopper continued.

Becky smirked in amusement. "You and Terry would've gotten along. 'The Man' with a big capital 'M'. They'd pay...you know, a couple hundred bucks to people like my sister, give 'em drugs, psychedelics. LSD, mostly. And then they'd strip her naked and put her in these isolation tanks."

"Isolation tanks?" repeated Joyce.

"Yeah. These big bathtubs, basically, filled with salt water, so you can

float around in there. You lose any sense of, uh...sense and feel nothing, see nothing. They wanted to expand the boundaries of the mind. Real hippie crap."

Joyce frowned at the thought of anyone agreeing to do anything like that and Becky seemed to read her mind.

"I...I mean, it's not like they were forcing her to do any of this stuff. The thing is, though, is that she didn't know she was pregnant at the time."

"Jane," Joyce stated. She sighed, amazed and appalled at the incredible story. "Do you have any pictures of her?"

Becky's face contorted into bewilderment as she looked from Joyce to Hopper. "I don't think you guys understand. Terry miscarried in the third trimester."

Joyce gave Hopper a shocked gaze and he continued to stare at Becky in puzzlement. If Terry never gave birth why would she think her daughter had been kidnapped? And who was the kid in Benny's diner? Becky led the visitors into a small room down the hall. It was a bright, little room set up as a nursery. It should have been a cheerful chamber, but something about the vacant room seemed haunting.

"She keeps all of this up. Been doing it for twelve years. Terry, uh, pretends like Jane is real," Becky explained as Hopper prodded the hanging mobile over the crib. It began to rotate and a lullaby played as the baby clowns twirled jauntily. "Like she's gonna come home someday. Says she's special. Born with abilities."

Becky waved her hand to imply mysticism. Joyce came up short.

"Abilities?" she repeated.

"You read any Stephen King?" asked Becky with a raise of her eyebrows.

Hopper and Joyce traded looks of dawning realization and amazement as they thought of the child's room that existed in the lower levels of a secret laboratory. Becky chuckled.

"You guys look scared, actually," she laughed mockingly. "I mean, it's all make-believe."

Joyce cleared her throat. "What - what kind of abilities?"

"Telepathy, telekinesis...You know shit you can do with your mind. That's why the big, bad Man stole Jane away. Her baby's a weapon, off fighting the commies. You know, the doctor's all say," Becky took a swig from her cigarette before continuing. "It's a coping mechanism. You know, to deal with the guilt."

"Do you think there is any chance she could be telling the truth?" asked Joyce. Becky looked appalled and Joyce quickly backpedaled. "A-about having had the kid?"

"There is no birth certificate, nothing from the hospital. Doctors and nurses all confirmed that she miscarried."

"Yeah, but that could've been covered up. Right?" Hopper asked feeling irritated by Becky's lack of concern. Had she been this way when Terry had led a relentless search for her daughter? Had Terry waged war against Brenner, bore the label of impairment, and pled her case with no one on her side?

Becky grinned. "Like I said, you and Terry would've gotten along."

The lullaby played its last note as the mobile came to a standstill.

---

Lucas ran his bike up a leafy hill in the woods. However, he soon found his path blocked by a barbed fence. He glanced down to check his compass. It was going haywire but the needle seemed to indicate that he was heading in the right direction. His eyes traveled down the length of the fence first to the left then to the right. He could not discern any way to get inside and realized he would have to walk around until he found the entrance.

"Aw, man," he complained. He adjusted his bike to the left and set off.

---

In the towns local hunting shop Jonathan roamed the aisles searching

for supplies. He picked up a gas canister as in the next aisle Nancy filled a shopping basket with random bits of supplies such as a hammer, chains, and large nails. She came to the end of the aisle and Jonathan joined her as they both set eyes on the contraption before them. Nancy looked to Jonathan with raised eyebrows and he gave a little nod, so she added the bear trap to their growing inventory of weapons.

Once they had gathered what they could they placed each item on the clerk's counter as the owner watched baffled.

"And I'll have four boxes of uh thirty-eights," Jonathan added. The man reached back and retrieved the ammunition from behind the counter.

"What you kids doin' with all this?" he asked them.

"Um..." Jonathan looked to Nancy uncomfortably and at a complete loss.

Nancy thought quickly for a moment before shrugging and answered innocently, "Monster hunting."

"Huh," the man shrugged appeased and rung them up.

"Monster hunting?" Jonathan repeated to Nancy once they had reached his car in the parking lot.

Nancy grinned as Jonathan opened the trunk and they began loading the items into the back.

"You know, last week...I was shopping for a new top I thought Steve might like. It took me and Barb all weekend. It seemed like life or death, you know? And...and now-"

"You're shopping for bear traps with Jonathan Byers," he finished for her.

"Yeah," she answered, and he shut the trunk with a slam.

"What's the weirdest part? Me or the bear trap?" he asked her.

She met his eyes and smirked. "You. It's definitely you."

He grinned but before he could respond a car drove past and someone honked their horn. Turning they saw a fellow classmate in the passenger seat wave to them before saying, "Hey Nance! Can't wait to see your movie."

"What the hell was that?" Jonathan frowned.

Nancy stared after them in bewilderment. Then, with a sinking dread she spun around and stared down the street.

"What?" implored Jonathan.

She ignored him however, and walked past him still scanning the street.

"What? Hey! Where're you going?" Jonathan called out as Nancy ran off her speed picking up. "Nancy, wait! Nancy!"

She ran into the street and came to a stop outside of the movie theater staring in horror. The theater manager and his assistant exclaimed angrily over the spectacle.

"I can't believe it!"

"These kids!"

A lump lodged in Nancy's throat and her eyes stung with tears as Nancy read the sign over the theater's ticket box that displayed movies currently playing. This particular movie was *All the Right Moves*, except someone had added in bright, red spray paint the words "Starring Nancy 'The Slut' Wheeler".

"Jesus," muttered Jonathan furiously.

Nancy peered around and realized people were staring at her. One passing woman actually exclaimed gleefully, "Wow."

In the distance Nancy could hear Tommy's laughter. Rage boiling inside her she set off again and Jonathan headed after her.

"Wait!" he called.

"Tommy you write like a three-year-old," teased Carol as Nancy whirled around the corner.

"Shut up!" Tommy retorted.

"I didn't know you could spell," Nicole mocked. Nancy stared down the alleyway where Tommy was spraying something onto the side of a building with a spray can of the same bright, red paint as of the vandalized movie theater sign.

Nancy stomped her way over eyes on Steve. Carol's attention diverted she cooed, "Aw, hey there, princess!"

"Uh oh! She looks upset!" said Tommy.

Steve watched her approach him with a stony gaze and when Nancy came to a halt before him she slapped him hard across his face.

"Oh!" gasped Carol.

"Damn!" exclaimed Tommy.

"What is wrong with you?" Nancy shot at Steve.

"What's wrong with me? What's wrong with you? I was worried about you. I can't believe that I was actually worried about you," Steve scoffed.

"What are you talking about?" asked a thoroughly puzzled Nancy.

"I wouldn't lie if I were you. You don't want to be known as the lying slut now, do you?" Carol recommended.

Just then Jonathan came running up behind Nancy. He sized up the situation before him as Tommy hopped down from his perch on the crate.

"Speak of the devil. Hi."

Nancy spun around and her eyes settled on Jonathan. Suddenly

realizing she faced Steve and said in irritation, "You came by last night."

"Ding ding ding! Does she get a prize?" Carol ridiculed. Nancy wished she could slap her too.

"Look, I don't know what you think you saw, but it wasn't like that."

"What, you just let him into your room to ...study?" Steve looked down at her in disgust.

"Or for another pervy photo session?" Tommy laughed.

"We were just-" Nancy began but she pulled up short realizing there was no way to explain last night's events.

"You were just what? Finish that sentence," Steve drew near to her as he stared down menacingly into her face. "Finish the sentence."

Nancy tried to steady her breathing as anger and frustration threatened to break loose. She could feel tears smarting her eyes and she fought desperately to hold them back. Steve shook his head with revulsion.

"Go to hell, Nancy."

"Come on, Nancy, let's just leave," Jonathan pleaded as he rushed forward to take her arm.

Steve turned his attention to Jonathan. "You know what, Byers? I'm actually kind of impressed." He gave Jonathan a push. "I always took you for a queer, but I guess you're just a little screw-up like your father."

Again Steve shoved Jonathan, willing him to fight back. Jonathan walked away trying to shove his emotions down beneath the surface. The place where no one could see him or touch him, but Steve was relentless.

"Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that house is full of screw-ups."

Another shove.

"You know, I guess I shouldn't really be surprised. A bunch of screw-ups in your family," Steve continued. Jonathan had stopped walking and Nancy turned to him imploring.

"Jonathan, leave it!"

"I mean, your mom...I'm not even surprised what happened to your brother. I'm sorry I have to be the one to tell you-"

"Steve, shut up!" Nancy shouted, but Steve gave Jonathan yet another shove.

"But the Byers, their family, it's a disgrace to the entire-"

Jonathan fell over the edge. He spun on the spot and punched Steve neatly across his face. Steve caught himself on the side of the building and his left hand cradled his back at Jonathan he tackled him around the waist and the two fell back against the hood of Steve's car.

"Steve!" shouted Nancy.

Steve threw Jonathan to the ground and they grappled wildly over the pavement.

"Stop! Steve! Knock it off, you guys!" Nancy screamed.

"Get off of him, seriously!" Carol yelled.

"Kick his ass man!" Tommy urged.

"Get off! Stop!"

Jonathan and Steve continued their violent fight amid the shouts of the others. Jonathan managed to throw Steve off him and darted to his feet before taking another swing at him hitting Steve's face again.

"Get in there, he's going to hurt himself!" Carol solicited Tommy who stepped between the two and attempted to hold Jonathan back.

"Easy! Easy!"



But Steve pushed Tommy away. "ey. hey! Get out of here! Get out of here! Get out of here!"

Tommy stepped aside and Jonathan shuffled up and made another swing at Steve, but this time Steve ducked and popping back up managed to land a punch across Jonathan's jaw. Jonathan recoiled for a moment but with furious yell he hit Steve again so hard that Steve stumbled back in shock. Jonathan hit him yet again so that Steve, unable to fight back, collapsed to the ground.

"Jonathan, stop! Stop, you're going to hurt him!" Nancy pleaded. "Jonathan, stop!"

Sirens sounded in the distance but Jonathan took no notice of the sound or of the Nancy's , he leaned down and dragged Steve up by his shirt landing another punch to mangled face.

"Cops!" Tommy shouted as he took note of the sirens.

"Guys! Jonathan,get off of him! Stop it!" shouted Nancy.

"Cops! Come on!" yelled Tommy again as Officers Powell and Callahan rounded the corner.

"Just go Carol!" shouted Tommy and Carol and Nicole took off down the alley as Tommy attempted to pry Jonathan off of Steve. "Hey, he's had enough, man! I said he's had enough!"

"Kid! All right!" yelled Officer Powell.

It took both Callahan and Tommy to pull Jonathan off of Steve and Jonathan lashed back without thought hitting the officer.

"Oh my nose!" cried Callahan.

Powell held Jonathan back shouting, "Calm down!"

At that moment Steve and Tommy took their chances and bolted away.

"Hey! Hey!" bawled Callahan. "Come here little guys, come here!"

Powell leaned Jonathan over his cruiser and cuffed him as Jonathan struggled.

"Get off!"

"I got this one!" Powell shouted to Callahan's back as he gave chase to the teenagers.

"Get back here! I said get back here, you little punks!"

Nancy ran her hands over her face in anguish as she watched helplessly as Jonathan was arrested.

---

Becky walked Joyce and Hopper to the front door. As they passed the sitting room where Terry Ives sat numbly Hopper gave her one last look before making his way to the porch. Joyce however, paused to watch her.

"Well, thank you for your time. We appreciate it," Hopper said to Becky.

"Hmm, yeah. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help," she nodded.

Joyce watched anxiously as Terry rocked back and forth. She seemed to be whispering something to herself, but Joyce heard nothing. She felt as if she was staring into window of the future. Her future. In which twelve years of fruitless searching lead to a empty void where her child once was.

"Good luck," said Becky.

"Thank you," Hopper replied gratefully.

Slamming the car door shut Joyce sat in the passenger's seat and sighed deeply her head in her hand.

"Hey..." Hopper watched her.

"What?" whispered Joyce wearily.

"We're gonna find him."

"Yeah, like Terry found her daughter?"

"We're close."

"Twelve years. Twelve years she's been looking for her-" Joyce pointed out.

"And then she shows up at Benny's five nights ago, which means we've got a chance. You know what I would give? For a chance?" Hopper whispered. "You know what I would give?"

"Hey, Chief, you there? Hey, Chief?" Callahan piped over the radio.

"Yeah, go ahead," Hopper stated.

"Yeah, a fight broke out here and-"

"Cal, I don't have time for this," Hopper sighed.

"It's Jonathan Byers." Hopper and Joyce shared alarmed looks. "You haven't seen Joyce, have you?"

---

At the police station Flo pulled out a tray of ice cubes from the freezer in the staff lounge.

"Do you think we'll be out of here soon?" Nancy asked her as she watched her pile ice onto a cloth spread across the counter.

"You, yes. Him, no. He assaulted a police officer," she informed her.

"Well, how long are you gonna keep him?" persisted Nancy.

"You and your boyfriend have big plans, do you?"

Nancy stuttered, "He - he's not my boyfriend."

"I think you better tell him that."

"What?"

Flo gave her a stern glance. "Only love makes you that crazy, sweetheart. And that damn stupid."

She held out the cloth she had tied together into an ice pack and with a small sigh Nancy took it and went back to sit beside Jonathan who was presently cuffed to a desk.

"Found some ice," she said.

"Thanks," he muttered in a low voice. He shifted a little closer and awkwardly tilted his head as she held the ice to his face. She watched him closely as he stared mindlessly at the desk. Feeling her gaze he met her eyes but she averted her gaze.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Yeah. Everything's fine," she responded as she met his eyes again. A small smile spread across her lips and her eyes flitted away.

---

Beneath a canopy of colorful leaves Eleven sat with her legs folded under her, chewing the cold waffles she had stolen. As she ate she heard voices in the distance and she glanced around her for the source as her heart sped up.

"El!"

"Eleven!"

Several yards away, Mike and Dustin walked their bikes across the leafy ground as they called out. "Eleven!"

"El!" yelled Dustin.

Mike repeated, "El! Eleven!"

"Eleven!"

Mike came to a stop as he heard the sound of breaking twigs underfoot. "Hey, stop. do you hear that?"

"What?" Dustin looked around quizzically.

"El!" Mike shouted again scanning the area. "El?"

The source of the noise revealed itself but it was not Eleven. It was Troy and James stalking nearer. Troy pulled out a pocket knife.

"Hey, there, Frogface."

"Toothless," cackled James.

Dustin dropped his bike. "Shit! Run Mike!"

He made a break for it as Mike dropped his bike too yelling, "What?"

"Run! Come on!" Dustin implored Mike who ran after him.

With a quick glance at one another the bullies gave chase, Troy yelling, "You're dead, Wheeler!"

"Move, Mike! Mike, come on, run!" Dustin urged his friend.

---

Elsewhere in the woods Lucas made his way along the barbed fence. He finally reached a corner of the perimeter so that the fence traveled off to the right. He consulted his compass again and saw that he was beginning to head in the wrong direction. He backtracked several paces then came to the conclusion that the gate's location must be within the fenced in area of Hawkins Lab. Well, it was the Department of Energy. Didn't Mr. Clarke say something about needing energy to open up a hole in the space-time continuum? And it made sense that the military would be involved in something as dangerous as this.

Excitement mounting at his discovery Lucas climbed into a nearby tree pulling out his binoculars to get a better look. He watched as several men walked into the building all wearing suits. He did not recognize any of them so he continued searching along the building. He scanned the roof and found nothing so he went back to searching the grounds. Then he saw something at once both amazing and terrifying. A military truck driving up a path past several white Hawkins Power and Light vans.

Hawkins Power and Light were not a military company. Unless that was what they wanted people to think. Suddenly, Lucas remembered the technician out in front of his house that morning. They were

being watched.

---

Dustin and Mike rounded the side of a rocky interface on the road overlooking Sattler's quarry.

"Cramp!" Dustin groaned, and his pace slowed as he clutched his side.

"Just keep going! Keep going!" Mike encouraged him.

Troy came around and sped up in his effort to reach Dustin. The boys continued until suddenly Mike and Dustin spotted James ahead of them. He must have cut through the woods to the road ahead.

"Shit!" Dustin faltered. He and Mike skidded a stop, trapped between the two bullies on one side and the rocky interface and the quarry on another.

With no where else to go Mike snatched a large rock from the ground and Dustin lifted up a stick. They held their weapons up threateningly.

"Stay back! Don't come any closer!" Mike yelled and he threw the rock at James, but it missed by several feet.

"Nice throw, numbnuts," mocked James.

With a wild battle cry Dustin swung haphazardly at Troy who dodged the blow easily before catching Dustin around the shoulders. He held the knife to Dustin's face. Dustin stretched his neck away from the shiny blade in fright.

"Get off! Get off me!"

"Let him go! Let him go!" Mike shouted.

"Stay back, or I cut him!" Troy threatened.

"What do you want?" Mike asked desperately.

"I want to know how you did it!" Troy shouted back.

"How I did what?"

"I know you did something to me. Some nerdy science shit to make me do that."

"You mean piss your pants," Mike shot at him.

"Our friend has superpowers, and she squeezed your tiny bladder with her mind," Dustin taunted truthfully.

"Shut up!" Troy brought the blade dangerously close to Dustin's mouth and Dustin again leaned his head in an attempt to get away from it. "I think I should save Toothless here a trip to the dentist. Help him lose the rest of his baby teeth."

"Let him go! Let him go!" Mike bellowed.

"I'll let him go, sure. But first...it's your turn," said Troy.

"My turn for what?"

"Wet yourself."

The absurdity of Troy's demand caught Mike off guard. "What?"

Troy gestured at the cliff overlooking Sattler's quarry. "Jump...or Toothless here gets an early trip to the dentist."

"Stop! No!" Dustin gasped trying to break free from Troy.

"I'll cut him right now!"

Dustin whimpered in fright and Mike unable to stand seeing Dustin so frightened and vulnerable said, "All right, just hold on! Hold on!"

He stepped closer to the cliff's edge.

Dustin yelled in alarm. "Mike, don't do it. I don't need my baby teeth, Mike! Mike, seriously, don't!"

Ignoring him, Mike stepped up to the edge of the cliff and looked down at the still water. His heart pounded with adrenaline and his breath seemed to catch somewhere along his airway. He watched as a

few pebbles fell to the water's surface as his toes met the edge. One more step and he too would plunge to the bottom. It was so high. Could he survive?

"Mike, don't do it! Seriously, don't do it! Seriously, don't!" Dustin begged.

James looked to Troy with a sick feeling creeping up in his stomach. "Troy, I don't think this is a good idea, man."

"Mike, don't!" Dustin bellowed.

"Dentist's office opens in five...four! Three! Two!"

"Mike!"

"One!"

Mike stepped forward and with a scream Mike disappeared over the cliff. Dustin gasped in horror, and Troy shocked dropped his arm. The three boys rushed forward to peer over the side.

"Holy shit," said Dustin.

Gasping in fear Mike hovered about midway down the cliff face staring down at the water. Crying out in terror Mike felt his body float back up.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa!" he shouted. The others watched as Mike flew over their heads, legs flailing, hair dangling until abruptly he dropped to solid ground with a grunt. Looking briefly at the bewildered boys Mike's eyes fell on an approaching figure.

With a gaze of fury Eleven marched forward in her pink dress, and blue jacket. Troy and James would have that she were a boy if hadn't been for the dress. Troy rushed forward to attack her but a sudden burst of energy forced James to fall backward. Troy stared down at him in alarm then back at Eleven who twitched her head. A force hit Troy's arm so powerfully that with a earsplitting crack Troy's arm was broken. He cried out in pain, dropping his knife.

"She broke my arm! My arm!"



Coming to a halt Eleven glared at the bully threateningly, blood pouring down her nose.

"Go," she commanded.

James hopped to his feet and took off, Troy running after him.

"Let's get outta here! Let's go!

"Go!"

Grinning after them Dustin yelled, "Yeah that's right! You better run! She's our friend and she's crazy! You come back here and she'll kill you! You hear me? She'll kill you, you sons of bitches! She'll kill you, you hear me?"

Dustin's voice faded into an echo as Eleven dropped to the ground in exhaustion.

---

*In the blank nothingness Eleven searched around her seeking what she did not want to find. She saw something in the distance, and she forced herself to breathe. She could hear it moving in the water that covered the surface she stood on, if you could call it a surface. Slowly, fearfully, she walked toward it. Whatever it was growled as she neared, she could not tell what it was doing, but she could tell it was far from human or any other animal Papa had told her about.*

*As her trembling form came up right behind it, she could see that it was crouching low, and if it were to stand, it would be far taller than she was. It's growls were loud and terrifying, she reached out to touch it's shoulder but she hesitated, afraid. Papa's words came back to her. That it could not hurt her and she tried to remember that she wasn't really here. She was in the bath. She touched it, and it turned and roared at her. She saw nothing but teeth and blood from whatever it had been eating. She screamed in agonizing fear.*

*In the lab Eleven screamed in the water tank and the lights of the lab turned to red and the machines went haywire. The building around them seemed to shake as the concrete walls began to crumble. Scientists ran for their lives, as Eleven screamed, and screamed, and screamed...*

---

"El, are you okay? El?" Mike grabbed Eleven's arm anxiously.

Sobbing, Eleven look up at into Mike's worried face. "Mike...I'm sorry."

"Sorry? What are you sorry for?"

"The gate...I opened it. I'm the monster," as she said it something seemed to fall away inside her. But rather than running from her or yelling horrible things Mike smiled.

"No. No, El, you're not the monster. You saved me. Do you understand? You saved me."

He pulled her up, and wrapped his arms around the crying girl. He held her as she rested her head on his shoulder, tears falling silently down her face. Dustin stared down at his friend and the strangest girl he had ever met, and affection flooded his heart. Kneeling beside them, he too wrapped his arms around the pair, and the three children sat huddled on the edge of the cliff, there arms wrapped around each other.

Several minutes later Eleven, Mike, and Dustin walked across the field from Mike's house, unaware of the repairman in his power and light van watching them.

The man pulled out a radio and transmitted, "I have eyes on 'em now. They're heading home."

---

In a bunker room at Hawkins Lab men retrieved shooter rifles, and sidearms many of who wore dark blue jumpsuits. They marched from the building and followed Dr. Brenner, to a line of waiting white vans. Engines started one by one and in a tree outside of the lab's fenced perimeter Lucas watched the vans take off down the road through his binoculars. If he had any doubts before, he didn't now. Repairmen did not need guns.

Mike, Dustin, and Eleven walked down to the lower level of the Wheeler homestead at the end of the cul-de-sac. The boys dropped their bikes and they all headed inside. Eleven paused before entering

and scanned the area before heading inside and closing the door.

## **8. Chapter 7 - The Bathtub**

### **Chapter Seven - The Bathtub**

With a washcloth Mike gently wiped the dirt from Eleven's face. She held still, her eyes watching his every movement.

"That's better," he said. She peered at him for a moment then turned to the mirror of the bathroom sink to view her reflection. She ran her hand sadly over her buzzed hair, wishing she had kept the wig.

Mike, who stood watching, commented, "You don't need it."

"Still pretty?" Eleven asked uncertainly.

"Yeah!" Mike piped quickly. "Pretty. Really pretty."

Glancing back at her reflection a small smile formed over her lips. The words were simple but they made her feel so much happier. Especially since Mike had said them.

Mike hesitated then said, "El?"

"Yes?"

"Um, I'm happy you're home."

"Me, too," she smiled.

Somewhat unaware of what he wanted to do or say Mike leaned closer to Eleven. He noticed that his heart was thumping madly in his chest and he felt the way he had on the train tracks the day before. Butterflies fluttering in his stomach. Or like when he stood on that cliff working up the courage to jump. She was awfully close now and his eyes were drawn to her lips, and she was watching him closely, leaning toward him.

The door burst open and Mike and Eleven leapt back from one another.

"Guys!" Dustin said urgently. "It's Lucas, I think he's in trouble."

They followed him at a run out of the basement bathroom as Dustin picked up Mike's *Supercomm* and said, "Do you remember how he said he was looking for the gate?"

"Yeah..." Mike answered as they all gazed at the radio with trepidation.

"What if he found it?"

Lucas' voice came over the radio, but it was garbled and broken.

Mike asked Dustin, "What's he saying?"

"I don't know, he's way out of range."

"...son of a bitch!" they heard Lucas shout.

"Lucas, if you can hear us, slow down. We can't understand you," Mike transmitted over the radio.

Lucas paddled his bike hard down a street as he bellowed into his radio, "Yes! I copy! Do you? They know about Eleven! Get out of there! They know about Eleven! The bad men are coming! All of them! Do you hear me? The bad men are coming!"

"Mad hen'. Does that mean anything to you? Like a code name or something?" Dustin inquired to Mike.

"The bad men are coming!" Lucas' voice shouted over the radio.

"Bad men'. Bad men!" Mike repeated. He set the radio on the table and told Eleven, "Stay here!"

Dustin followed as Mike dashed to the first floor landing. Pulling aside the curtain from a window overlooking the street the boys spotted a white Hawkins power and light van. A mustached man sat in the driver's seat with a clear view of the Wheeler's house.

"What's that guy doing?" Mike wondered out loud.

"You don't think..." Dustin began. Mike gave him a look then darted away into the kitchen where his mother was busy talking to someone

on the phone.

"Well, I know she and Steve have been spending some time together, so I thought maybe-" Karen was saying.

"Mom!" Mike petitioned his mother.

"Well, i-is he home? Maybe you could ask him?" Karen continued.

"Mom!" Mike shouted.

"I'm sorry, could you just hold on, please?" Karen spun around and, using her hand to block the mouthpiece, she griped, "Michael, I'm on the phone. I've told you a million times-"

"Did you schedule any repairs?" Mike cut across her tirade.

"What?"

"Is there anyone supposed to come and do repairs on the house?" he asked urgently.

In the other room Dustin observed as several more identical vans joined the one parked in the street. The men inside all seemed to be gazing at the Wheeler's home, and as he watched one of them looked directly at Dustin. His eyes growing wide, he quickly yanked the curtains closed.

"I don't understand. Is there something wrong-" Karen asked confused.

"No, Mom, nothing's wrong in the house," Mike shook his head in irritation.

"Mike!" Dustin shouted as he entered the kitchen.

"One second," Mike disregarded him, holding up his index finger.

"Mike!" Dustin bellowed so that Mike jumped around in alarm. Speaking between pants Dustin said, "We need to leave...right...now."

With a glance at his mother Mike took off after Dustin.

"Michael!" Karen yelled at her son in bewilderment.

Skidding to a stop Mike said, "If anyone asks where I am, I've left the country."

"What?" she yelled as he took off.

Seconds later Dustin, Mike, and Eleven fled from the basement. The boys gathered up their bikes and ran up the hill beside the house. Once at the top they clambered onto their bike seats, Eleven getting on behind Mike. Pausing they peered down at the street where several men wearing blue jumpsuits and brown utility belts stood gathered amid one tall, white haired man wearing a dark suit and trench coat. Eleven's eyes met Brenner's and they gazed momentarily at one another.

"Go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go!" Dustin ordered panicked. The children took off on their bikes and Brenner, biting his lip with renewed determination, spun around and returned to the vans along with his men. The engines started, and the tires squealed as they turned out of the cul-de-sac to give chase.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!" Dustin panted as he biked faster than he ever had before.

"Dustin! Dustin, do you copy?" piped Lucas over the radio.

Dustin answered into his headset. "Yes, Lucas, they're on us!"

"Where are you?"

"Cornwallis!"

"Meet me at Elm and Cherry!"

"Copy. Elm and Cherry!" Dustin shouted at Mike.

"Okay!" Mike responded. He twirled his handlebars to cross someone's lawn and rode down the driveway onto the next street over. As they did two vans appeared at the end of the street behind them.

"Shit!" Dustin hollered.

"This way, come on!" Mike yelled and he directed his bike across another lawn. Rolling downhill into someone's backyard Dustin rang the bell on his bike in warning to a couple of girls playing a patti cake game.

"Out of the way! Out of the way!" he commanded. The girls leapt to the side and they watched appalled as first Dustin, then Mike and what looked like a boy wearing a dress sped past them.

They arrived on the next street over just as Lucas skidded to a stop beside them.

"Lucas!" Mike exclaimed.

Panting from his wild journey from the lab Lucas asked, "Where are they?"

"I-I don't know," Mike admitted.

"I think we lost them," said Dustin hopefully, but the rev of an engine forced the children to turn and watch as three vans sped around the corner on their street. The tires screeched as the vehicles picked up speed.

"Go, go, go, go, go!" Mike screamed as Dustin yelled in fright. "Go, go, go, go, go! Faster, faster!"

"Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!" Dustin cursed, but soon another van drove around the street corner where they were headed, effectively trapping them.

Dustin yelled again. Mike and Lucas gasped out of breath. Eleven however, focused her mind on the oncoming van blocking out all else as the vehicle came closer and closer. Suddenly, the van seemed to hit a wall and it was lifted straight into the air flipping over their heads until, with a deafening crash, it landed on its top blocking the path of the other three vans and causing them to swerve to a stop.

Eleven glanced back at the vehicles as the boys stared at one another in astonishment over what they had just witnessed. Eleven clung to Mike in exhaustion, blood streaming from her nose. Brenner climbed out from his van and stepped past the overturned vehicle to watch as



the children rode off down the street. Disappointed as he was to have them slip through his fingers he was impressed with Eleven's display of power.

Outside of the town's limits, Mike and Eleven arrived in the junkyard where he and Lucas had fought the day before. Mike climbed off his bike before turning to help Eleven to the ground.

Dustin and Lucas coasted to a stop as well. Lucas dropped his bike, weary from his frantic ride and Dustin gasped, "Holy - holy shit! Did - did you see what she did to that van?"

"No, Dustin, we missed it," panted Mike sarcastically.

"I mean that was...that was, uh..." Dustin searched for a word to describe the spectacle.

"Awesome," said Lucas.

They all turned to peer at Lucas who stood on wobbly legs gazing down at Eleven in amazement.

"It was awesome," he declared. Tottering forward he knelt beside her. "Everything I said about you being a traitor and stuff...I was wrong. I'm sorry."

He gave her a sorry look and placed his hand reassuringly on her shoulder.

"Friends...friends don't lie," Eleven said quietly. "I'm sorry, too."

Lucas smiled.

"Me, too," said Mike.

Looking up Lucas caught Mike's eye. Mike stuck out his hand and Lucas got to his feet. Glancing at his friend's outstretched arm Lucas took hold of it in a firm handshake of brotherhood.

---

Hopper pulled Joyce's car into the parking lot outside of the police station and as soon as he threw the vehicle in park Joyce leapt out of

the passenger side. Together they rushed into the building.

"Hey. Jonathan?" Joyce looked her son up and down as she took in his bruised face. "Jesus, what...what happened?"

Callahan came forward. "Ma'am..."

Jonathan stared down at his lap and muttered. "I'm fine."

Glancing furiously at Callahan, Joyce demanded to know. "Why is he wearing handcuffs?"

"Well, your boy assaulted a police officer. That's why," he answered sardonically.

"Take them off," she ordered.

"I am afraid I cannot do that," he declined.

"Take them off!" she shouted.

"You heard her. Take 'em off," Hopper commanded in agitation.

"Chief, I get everyone's emotional here, but there's something you need to see," Powell informed Hopper.

Outside in the parking lot Hopper opened the trunk of Jonathan's car and he, Powell, and Callahan peered down at the contents. Back in the station, Hopper dropped the box of hunting supplies on the desk before Jonathan, who gazed up at him somewhat fearfully as Joyce began sifting through the items.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Why don't you ask your son? We found it in his car," Hopper replied.

"What?" Joyce shot her son a puzzled look.

"Why are you going through my car?" Jonathan asked angrily.

"Is that really the question you should be asking right now?" Hopper interrogated him leaning down over the desk. "I wanna see you in my office."

'You won't believe me," Jonathan said quickly as Hopper made to head back to his office.

Leaning back down Hopper muttered, "Why don't you give me a try?"

---

Making her way down the basement steps Karen called out, "Mike? Mike?"

However, as she reached the bottom and looked around she found the basement empty. She gave a sigh as she glanced around but pulled up short when she noticed the little den Mike had made for Eleven. Confused she went to investigate the area, which was set up like a bed.

*Has Mike been sleeping down here?* She wondered. On a pillow she spotted several strands of long, blonde hair. At first she thought it might be Holly's, but Holly's hair was longer than the these strands and darker. Before she could give it much thought she the front doorbell rang from overhead.

Upstairs Ted idled toward the front door and whoever waited continued to ring the bell incessantly.

"Yeah, just a minute, please," he called, then muttered under his breath, "Jiminy Christmas. Hold your horses."

Answering the door Ted found himself confronted by several men and a woman clad in business suits in his yard. Cars were parked all along the cul-de-sac. They all wore grim expressions.

"Mr. Wheeler?" asked Connie Frazier.

"Yes?" he answered uncertainly as he looked her up and down, Karen came in from the foyer as Connie pulled out a government badge and displayed it to them. Karen gaped wide-eyed at the agents in her yard.

Several minutes later the men were searching through every item of the house, carrying away boxes of evidence found mostly in their basement. Karen watched them anxiously, clutching Holly in her arms. She moved to stand beside Ted in the kitchen as a man headed

downstairs.

In the basement, an agent flipped curiously through the *Dungeons and Dragons* guidebook while another searched through Eleven's den. Brenner rifled through the laundry basket before pulling out a large, bright, yellow t-shirt. It bore a picture of a burger sandwich and the restaurant name "Benny's".

"I-I-I don't understand. You think my son is hiding this girl?" Karen gestured to the file lying before her on the dining room table which had a picture of Eleven clipped to the front.

Ted, who stared quizzically at the photo, asked, "What happened to her hair?"

With a glance at Ted, Connie looked to Karen and said, "We just need to know if you've seen her in the past week."

Karen shook her head, nervously, "No, no."

"Absolutely not. Our son with a girl?" Ted chuckled. "I mean, believe me, if he had a girl sleeping in this house, we'd know about it. Wouldn't we?" he glanced at his wife.

Connie waited for Karen's answer as she sighed uncertainly.

"This girl...what has she done?" Karen asked, staring down at the photo. What could be so dangerous about a little girl?

"I'm afraid I can't answer that," Connie responded.

Peering again at the photo Ted commented, "Oh my God, is she Russian?"

Again Karen sighed in frustration. "You can't treat us like this!"

"I need you to stay calm," Connie told her.

Karen pointed a shaking finger at her.

"You come into my house, and you tell me that my son is hiding some girl," she picked up the file and tossed it back down as her voice rose,

becoming hysterical. "And that he's in danger, but you can't tell us why? And you, what, you expect me to remain, what, calm?"

Connie glanced up at Brenner who approached from behind the Wheeler's. With a small nod she rose from her seat and Brenner sat in her place. He nodded his head to Ted and met Karen's eyes.

"I understand how upsetting this is," he said in a calm, quiet voice that nonetheless held authority. "I wish we could tell you more...but I can tell you that your son, Michael, is in real danger."

Karen looked away fearing whatever her son had become mixed up in.

Brenner continued, "We want to help him. We will help him. I give you my word. But in order for me to do that...you have to trust me. Will you trust me?"

Karen gazed back at the mysterious man. Something about him made her feel simultaneously nervous yet calm. He was almost hypnotic. He was clearly someone powerful and authoritative. She sensed danger from him but could not decide if he was someone to be trusted or not. Slowly, she nodded her head.

"Good. Now..." said Brenner. "Do you have any idea where your son might have gone?"

---

Lucas carved a line into the dirt beside one of the sticks of which he had laid on the ground to form a distorted trapezoid, saying, "This is Randolph Road, right here."

He pointed his drawing stick at one corner of the trapezoid nearest Eleven.

"The fence starts here, and goes all the way around," he circled around the sticks, then placed an old soda can into the center of the shape. "And this is the lab right here. The gate's gotta be in there somewhere. It's gotta be."

"Well, who owns Hawkins' lab?" asked Dustin.

Lucas replied, "The sign says 'Department of Energy'."

"Department of Energy?" Dustin repeated. "What do you think that means?"

"It means government. Military," Mike answered.

"Then why does it say 'energy'?" Dustin questioned.

"Just trust me, all right? It's military. My dad's told me before."

"Mike's right," Lucas confirmed. "There's soldiers out front."

"Do they make, like, lightbulbs or something?" asked Dustin.

"No, weapons...to fight the Russians, and commies, and stuff," Mike informed.

"Weapons," Lucas repeated looking at Eleven. She stared back.

Mike and Dustin gasped as realization hit them.

"Oh, Jesus, this is bad," Dustin said.

"Really bad," Lucas emphasized. "The place is like a fortress."

"Well, what do we do?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know, but we can't go home. We're fugitives now," Mike said.

Dustin looked off into the distance as his ears picked up the sound of something approaching. "G-guys? Do you hear that?"

They squinted at the sky, as a helicopter came into view a few miles off.

"Go, go, go, go!" urged Mike as the boys hurriedly stuffed their bikes underneath a broken down school bus, hiding them from view.

"Come on, come on! It's stuck!" whined Dustin.

"Let's go, let's go, let's go!" Lucas panicked.

"Hurry up! Hurry, come on!" Mike yelled.

"Come on!"

Dustin finally succeeded in getting his bike under the bus and he yelled, "Go, go, go, go, go, go!"

The blades of the helicopter grew louder the boys climbed into the broken down bus behind Eleven. They ran to the back and crouched low on the floor, careful to keep out of sight from the windows. They listened closely as the sounds of the aircraft faded away.

"Mental," said Dustin.

---

Joyce passed the enlarged image of the creature that stood behind Barb in Steve Harrington's backyard to Hopper, who gazed momentarily at it before glancing up at Nancy and Jonathan.

"You say blood draws this thing?" he asked.

"We don't know," Jonathan replied.

"It's just a theory," Nancy supplied.

Joyce gave Jonathan a look of deep disappointment as she shook her head, and he looked down at his feet in shame.

"I'm sorry Mom," Jonathan told Joyce outside of Hopper's office.

"What, you're sorry? You're ...you're sorry," she repeated angrily. "That is not good enough, Jonathan."

"I know," he admitted.

"That's not even close. That's not even in the...in the ballpark."

"I wanted to tell you, I just-"

"What if this thing took you, too?" Joyce's voice trembled with emotion. "You risked your life...and Nancy's."

"I thought I could save Will...I still do," he said.

"This is not yours to fix alone," she told him. "You - you act like you're all alone out there in the world, but you're not. You're not alone."

"I know."

"God damn it, Jonathan," Joyce gave her son a small push.

"I know," he whispered.

"Damn it," she cried, and she went to push him again, but her anger at realizing the danger he had placed himself in faded into frustrated relief and she instead pulled him into a tight hug which he returned. He nestled his cheek against her shoulder missing the feel of his mother's embrace.

"I want an apology!" came an outraged voice from elsewhere in the station.

"An apology for what, exactly?" Callahan responded. Hopper's office door opened and he stepped out to hear what was going on.

"Where is the chief? I want to speak to him right this instant," said the angry voice.

Hopper closed the door to his office and told Joyce and Jonathan, "Stay here."

"Ma'am, I need you to calm down," Callahan told an irate woman.

"What is your name, Deputy?" she asked furiously as Troy stood watching from behind her.

"Well, I'm an officer...okay," Callahan said with a chuckle.

"Name and badge number, both of you!" she demanded of Callahan and Powell.

"What the hell is going on?" Hopper yelled over the voices.

"Chief-" began Powell.



"These men are humiliating my son," the woman spoke over him.

"No, no, no. Okay, that's not true," denied Callahan.

Troy's mother turned angrily back to Callahan. "Yes-"

"There was some kind of fight, Chief-" began Powell again.

Troy's mother spoke over him again. "A psychotic child broke his arm!"

Callahan stretched out his arm and held his palm out facing the ground to demonstrate a small child. "A little girl, Chief. A little one."

Again, the furious mother spun around and pointed at Callahan. "That tone! Do you hear that tone?"

"Honestly, I'm just trying to state a fact," Callahan spouted.

"I don't have time for this," griped Hopper.

"It was a little girl," finished Callahan.

"Will you please take a statement," Hopper ordered and when the woman had turned her back to him he mouthed "and get her out" while pointing to the exit.

"Yes," Callahan agreed as Hopper turned to leave.

"So what'd this girl look like?" Powell asked Troy.

Immediately Troy said, "She had no hair and she was bleeding from her nose. Like a freak."

Hopper came to a halt and turned back to stare at the boy. "What'd you just say?"

"I said she's a freak!" Troy repeated vehemently.

"No, her hair. What'd you say about her hair?" Hopper paced back toward them.

"Her head's shaved. She doesn't even look like a girl. And..." he stared

down at the station's floor, embarrassed to continue.

"And what?" Hopper asked with raised eyebrows.

"Tell the man, Troy," Troy's mother urged him gently. He looked first to her then to Hopper before continuing.

"She can...do things."

"What kind of things."

"Like...make you fly. And piss yourself," he stared back down at the floor.

"What?" Powell stated with wide eyes, but Hopper held up his hand to silence him.

"Was she alone?" Hopper asked.

Troy shook his head and said grudgingly. "She always hangs out with those losers."

"Losers'? What losers?"

---

Sitting atop his car trunk outside of the *Fair Mart* convenience store, Steve ran his tongue over his swollen lip, tasting blood. He could not stop thinking about the day's events. Tommy came out from the store and tossed him a bottle of pain relievers and a cold can of soda.

"Hey. You owe me a dollar twenty," he told Steve. He watched as Steve popped a few of the pills and added, "Don't worry, he'll need more than aspirin when we're done with him."

"Yeah, if the creep ever gets out," Carol said with a shake of her red head as Steve held the can to his temple. "The cops should just lock him up forever. Did you see the look on his face?"

She pulled a grotesque face and lightly punched Tommy.

He laughed. "He probably had that same look whenever he killed his brother, right?"

Tommy gave Steve a pat who did not respond.

"Oh, God, I just got an image of him making that face while he and Nancy are screwing," Carol said pulling a disgusted face, and she and Tommy laughed.

"Carol, for once in your life, shut your damn mouth!" Steve told her angrily.

Taken aback Carol glanced at him and said, "What?"

"Hey, what's your problem, man?" asked Tommy.

Steve lowered the can from his temple and gazed at the two. "You're both assholes. That's my problem."

He hopped down from his car and shoved past Tommy.

"Are you serious right now, man?" he demanded of Steve.

"Yeah, I'm serious. You shouldn't have done that."

"Done what?"

"You know what."

"You mean call her out for what she really is?" said Tommy. "Oh, that's funny, because I don't remember you asking me to stop."

"I should've put that spray paint right down your throat," Steve muttered furiously.

"What the hell, Steve?" Carol griped.

"You know, neither of you ever cared about her," Steve stated. "You never even liked her, because she's not miserable like you two. She actually cares about other people."

"The slut with a heart of gold," shot Carol.

"I told you to watch your mouth!" Steve yelled at her.

Tommy shoved Steve into his car and said, "Hey! I don't know what's

gotten into you, man, but you don't talk to her that way."

Shoving Tommy back from him Steve answered, "Get out of my face."

But Tommy grabbed the collar of Steve's shirt and shoved him back against his car, holding him there as he muttered dangerously, "Or what? Or what? You gonna fight me now, too? Huh?"

Steve struggled unsuccessfully to break free from Tommy's grip as Tommy continued, "Because you couldn't take Jonathan Byers...so I wouldn't recommend that."

He released Steve, and after gazing hatefully at Tommy and Carol Steve opened the driver's side door and Tommy shoved him as he climbed in saying, "Here, let me get the door for you, buddy."

Tommy slammed the door and Steve started up the engine as Tommy hit at the car.

"That's right! Run away, Stevie boy! Run away!" As Steve backed out, the tires screeched in his haste to get away. "Just like you always do! That Nancy's turning you into a little pussy!"

Tommy hit the car again as Steve sped away and he yelled after the retreating car, "That's right Harrington run away! Run away!"

Tommy stared down the street and scoffed furiously.

---

An agent carried a box of evidence from the Wheeler's house that included the yellow sleeping bag Mike had given to Eleven, and the *Dungeons and Dragons* board game. He loaded the box into a car trunk full of other items of interest. Several paces away Hopper watched the agents through a pair of binoculars as Nancy stood gaping beside him.

"I have to go home," she said.

"No, you can't," Hopper told her.

"My mom...my dad are there," she said furiously.

"They're gonna be okay," he replied, but Nancy stepped around him and marched off toward her house. "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey."

Hopper caught hold of her arm holding her back and she yelled, "Let me go. Let go!"

"Hey! Listen to me. Listen to me," he urged her. "The last thing in the world we need is them knowing you're mixed up in all this."

"Mike is over there-!" she said pointing wildly down at the agents.

"They haven't found him. Not yet at least," and he pointed at the helicopter flying in the distance.

Nancy's mouth dropped in shock as Hopper pulled her back to the car. "For Mike?"

"Come on, get in the car."

Nancy climbed into the back beside Jonathan as Hopper closed the driver's door. Looking back at them he asked, "Look, we need to find them before they do. Do you have any idea where they might have gone?"

"No, I don't," Nancy muttered in fear and frustration.

"I need you to think," Hopper pushed.

"I don't know. We haven't talked a lot." As she said it Nancy realized she could not remember the last time she had really talked to her brother. "I mean, lately..."

Joyce hung over from her seat in the front asking, "Is there any place that your...your parents don't know about that he might go?"

"I-I-I don't know," she stuttered.

"I might," Jonathan said.

"What?" Hopper asked confused.

"I don't know where he is, but I think I know how to ask him."

Several minutes later they pulled up in front of Joyce's house. Exiting the car they took the house at a run and Jonathan stormed in and ran straight to Will's bedroom. Nancy pulled up short as she took in the state of the living room with Christmas lights hanging from the ceiling, furniture overturned, and a half-boarded up hole in the wall.

"Whoa," she muttered as Hopper and Joyce bypassed her.

In Will's bedroom Jonathan dashed past the bed and the many lamps his mother had used to speak to Will, and he began rummaging through Will's drawers. But Joyce, who had crawled underneath the bed, snagged Will's radio announcing, "I got it!"

---

Mike and his friends listened silently as the sounds of the helicopter began to fade away as it moved off to search elsewhere. They made no move to leave the old bus. It was as good a place to hide as any was.

"Mike, are you there? Mike?"

"You guys hear that?" Dustin looked around at the others.

"Mike, it's me, Nancy."

Mike lurched for his backpack and quickly pulled out his radio.

"Mike, are you there?" said Nancy's voice. "Answer. Mike, we need you to answer."

"Is that your sister?" asked Lucas confused.

"This is an emergency, Mike. Do you copy?" Nancy waited anxiously for a response as she sat beside Joyce on Will's bed. "Mike, do you copy?"

"Okay, this is really weird," Dustin said.

Lucas tried to snatch the radio from Mike but Mike pulled it away and yelled, "Don't answer!"

"She said it was an emergency," defended Lucas.

"What if it's a trick?"

"It's your sister!"

"What if the bad people kidnapped her? What if they're forcing her to say this?" Mike pointed out.

Nancy's voice came over the radio again. "I need you to answer."

"It's like Lando Calrissian. Don't answer!" Dustin gasped.

"We need to know that you're there, Mike," Nancy tried again.

Losing his patience Hopper snatched the radio from Nancy and transmitted, "Listen, kid, this is the Chief. If you're there pick up. We know you're in trouble and we know about the girl."

Mike frowned in confusion as Lucas asked, "Why is she with the chief?"

"How the hell does he know about..." Dustin's voice faded as he glanced down at Eleven.

Hopper's voice was saying, "We can protect you, we can help you, but you gotta pick up. Are you there? Do you copy? Over."

Mike gazed uncertainly at the others around him.

Hopper waited impatiently for an answer, but when none came he sighed and set the radio on Will's dresser. Turning to the others he asked, "Anybody got any other ideas?"

Joyce, Jonathan and Nancy were at a loss. Where would they even begin to search? But then they all snapped to attention as they stared at the radio where Mike's voice transmitted, "Yeah, I copy."

Dustin, Lucas and Eleven watched as Mike said, "It's Mike. I'm here."

He glanced at each of them in turn and corrected himself, "We're here."

---

The theater manager grumbled to himself as he scrubbed hard at the sign over his establishment. The only words left were "Slut Wheeler".

"Need a hand?" asked Steve as he stared up at the older man balanced on an A-frame ladder.

The man snapped around and peered down into Steve's swollen and bruised face.

"Did you have something to do with this?" he asked angrily.

"I just...I wanna help," admitted Steve.

The manager gave him a stern look, but with a shrug he climbed down from the ladder as Steve removed his jacket.

"All yours," said the manager as he handed Steve his rag. Steve took the damp cloth and climbed the A-frame. The theater employees watched as he scrubbed the words from their sign, hoping to himself that he could set things right. That he could prove he was not as much of a loser as he felt.

---

Karen and Ted watched the government agents in their yard from their living room window.

"They expect us to just sit here like prisoners," griped Karen anxiously. "We should be out there looking for him."

"Honey, we have to trust them, okay?" Ted said easily. "This is our government. They're on our side. "

Karen however, was not so certain as she watched Dr. Brenner stride away toward a car with Connie Fraizer.

"That man gives me the creeps," she admitted. Then a thought struck her and she turned to her husband. "Nancy. You don't think she's involved in this, too, do you?"

"Nancy with Mike?" Karen nodded and Ted chuckled. "No. No."

Karen turned back to watch the agents again, still not as certain as



her husband.

---

Mike, Lucas and Eleven sat apart from one another as Dustin paced anxiously back and forth from the front of the bus to the back to the front again."

Annoyed Mike complained, "Will you stop pacing?"

"It's been way too long," Dustin stated as he continued to pace. "Do you know what? Maybe you're right. Maybe this is all a trap and the bad men are coming to get us right now!"

"It's not a trap," reasoned Lucas. "Why would the chief set us up? Nancy, maybe, but the chief?"

Mike made an annoyed gesture at Lucas for throwing his sister under the bus.

"Lando Calrissian," Dustin pointed out in doubt.

"Would you shut up about Lando?" Lucas retorted.

"I don't feel good about this," said Dustin. He leaned down and yelled in Lucas face, "I don't feel good about this!"

"When do you feel good about anything?" Lucas roared back.

Dustin went back to his pacing as Lucas raised his hand to his temple, his head giving a particularly nasty throb around the knot Eleven had given him the day before. The sound of an approaching vehicle instantly grabbed their attention. Dustin darted to the front and Lucas, Mike and Eleven hurried after him. Watching through the grimy window two unmarked, black cars pulled into the junkyard.

"Shit!" spouted Dustin.

"Go, go, go, go," Mike urged the others as they ran to their hiding spots at the back of the bus.

"Lando," Dustin spat at Lucas.

"You think they saw us?" Lucas asked fearfully.

"Both of you, shut up," Mike whispered.

Three men climbed out of the cars as they gazed around the junkyard. They moved about the area slowly, careful to investigate every nook that might hide a child. Each man carried a sidearm gripped tightly in his hand. One of the men pulled up short as he took notice of something crammed beneath the broken down bus. Making his way over he crouched low to identify the objects, realizing as he came closer that they were kids' bikes.

He looked at the front of the bus to the doors which were closed. Raising his gun he inched along the length of the vehicle to open the sliding door. He peered inside, listening closely. As he was just about to enter a fist hit him hard over the head knocking him unconscious. The kids listened in confusion as they heard men's shouts and grunts.

"Hey!"

"What the-!"

The bus shook as something was thrown against it. The bus door creaked open and the kids all stood from their hiding spots as Hopper entered with his gun held up at the ready.

Hopper nodded at the sight of them and said, "All right, let's go."

The children simply gaped at him, unmoving so he yelled impatiently, "Let's go!"

Instantly they grabbed their bags and ran after him as if someone had suddenly pressed play on a cassette player.

---

Darkness had fallen over the Byers' home as Nancy, Jonathan and Joyce waited in anxious anticipation on the living room couch. They all jumped up as they heard the sounds of a car approaching, and Joyce hurried to open the front door. Rushing out onto the front porch Joyce and Jonathan watched as Hopper climbed out from his truck with the kids.

Nancy, stepping out onto the porch, exclaimed, "Mike. Oh, my God. Mike!"

She ran to hug her brother then, holding him at arm's length, she yelled in an accusatory tone, "I was so worried about you!"

"Yeah, uh, me, too," said Mike, confused.

Nancy rolled her eyes then glanced at the girl watching them from beside Dustin and Lucas. Mike turned to see what she was staring at as Nancy asked, "Is that my dress?"

Several minutes later Mike was holding up a sheet of notebook paper Joyce had provided him at his request. On it he had used Will's red marker to draw Mr. Clark's flea and acrobat analogy.

Joyce, Hopper, Jonathan and Nancy listened closely as he explained, "Okay, so, in this example, we're the acrobat."

He pointed to the stick figure with the marker, then to the dot.

"Will and Barbara, and that monster, they're this flea. And this is the Upside Down, where Will is hiding."

Joyce peered anxiously at Jonathan who sat in between her and Nancy on the living room couch once again. The children all knelt on the floor at the coffee table across from them.

Mike continued, "Mr. Clarke said the only way to get there is through a rip of time and space."

"A gate," Dustin piped.

"That we tracked to Hawkin's lab," Lucas informed.

"With our compasses," Dustin clarified, but Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy merely stared in confusion. "Okay, so the gate has a really strong electromagnetic field, and that can change the directions of a compass needle."

Sitting in a chair to the side Hopper asked, "Is this gate underground?"

"Yes," answered Eleven.

"Near a large water tank?" Hopper asked looking directly at Eleven.

She nodded and whispered, "Yes."

Dustin narrowed his eyes. "H-how do you know all that?"

"He's seen it," Mike answered.

Eleven snuck a scared glance at Hopper who continued to stare at her with a calculating gaze as Joyce asked her, "Is - is there any way that you could...that you could reach Will? That you could talk to him in this-?"

"The Upside Down," finished Eleven as she peered up into Joyce's hopeful eyes.

"Down. Yeah," repeated Joyce, her lip trembling.

Eleven nodded, and Nancy asked her, "And my friend Barbara? Can you find her, too?"

Very slowly, weary of all the eyes on her, Eleven nodded.

Now in the kitchen Eleven sat at the table with a radio and the torn photo of Barb sitting on the diving board before her. The radio played nothing but static as they all watched her closely.

Her eyes moved behind her eyelids as she used the static to pull her into the void of nothingness. The inbetween of worlds. The lights flickered as she searched and the others all gazed around in awe.

Eleven opened her eyes and with a sorrowful glance at Joyce, she whispered, "I'm sorry."

Joyce squeezed Jonathan's hand as it rested on her shoulder. "What? What's wrong? What - what happened?"

"I can't find them," Eleven admitted as she began to cry.

Eleven turned on the bathroom sink and held her hands under the

running water as she peered into the mirror. Tears leaked out of her eyes, and taking her wet hands, she pressed them over her eyelids blocking the world from view before dragging them down her face pulling slightly at her skin. She could see the redness of her lower eyelids as she did so. She had so wanted to help. To prove that she could use her powers to help people. Not hurt them. That she could make it right. It was her fault after all, that Will and Barb were missing. She had opened the gate. Let the monster in. And now that she had a chance to fix what happened, her powers didn't seem to want to work.

She turned the faucet off and looked once again at her reflection. That's when she caught sight of the bathtub behind her and she turned to stare at it, thinking.

Still in the kitchen Mike explained to the others, "Whenever she uses her powers, she gets weak."

"The more energy she uses, the more tired she gets," said Dustin.

"Like, she flipped the van earlier," Lucas reiterated.

"It was awesome," commented Dustin.

"But she's drained," Mike finished.

"Like a bad battery," added Dustin.

"Well...h-how do we make her better?" asked Joyce.

"We don't. We just have to wait and try again," said Mike.

"Well, how long?" Nancy questioned.

Mike shrugged. "I don't know."

"The bath," said Eleven.

Joyce and the others all spun around to face her.

"What?" asked Joyce.

Once again, weary of all the eyes on her, Eleven said, "I can find them. In the bath."

---

"Ahhhhh!" roared a man depicted on a television screen. Sweat ran down his face and his tongue lolled as he screamed in agony.

"Oh!" cringed a young woman as she curled closer to Scott on his living room couch. Explosions were now erupting on the screen. "Oh. Oh my...no. Mmm-hmm."

Scott wrapped his arms around his beautiful date and he consoled her soothingly, "Hey, you know how they did that? You know what that is?"

"Oh, what?" she asked as she peeked at the screen through squinted eyes.

"Melted plastic and microwaved bubble gum," he informed her. He pointed to the screen where the tortured character's head was oozing to the ground held to its body by only a few strands of "skin" as if the head was melted from the shoulders.

"No way. Really?" she asked, intrigued despite herself.

"Really," Scott assured her.

In the next room the phone rang and the young woman jumped in alarm as Scott glanced at his watch.

"What in the world?" he muttered in surprise at the late hour.

"Do you want me to pause it?"

"I'm sure it's just a wrong number," he presumed, and he stood and strolled over to answer the phone mid-ring. "Hello?"

"Mr. Clarke? It's Dustin," said Dustin from Joyce's house.

Surprised and worried Scott asked, "Dustin? Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. I just, I...I have a science question," Dustin framed his

request.

"It's ten o'clock on Saturday. Why don't we pick this up-" began Scott.

"Do you know anything on sensory deprivation tanks? Specifically how to build one?" Dustin interrupted.

"Sensory deprivation? W-what is this for?" Scott frowned at the unexpectedness of Dustin's request.

Dustin racked his brains for a quick moment before landing on his answer.

"Fun," he said simply, then he closed his eyes in abhorrence of his own pathetic response.

"Okay," clucked Scott. "Well...why don't we talk about it Monday? After school, okay?"

"You always say we should never stop being curious. To always open any curiosity door we find," quoted Dustin.

Scott spared a quick, embarrassed glance back at his date, "Dustin-"

But Dustin continued his assault. "Why are you keeping this curiosity door locked?"

Scott sighed. One day he was going to have to teach these kids some boundaries, but for now, with his words thrown back at him, he had to admit he had found himself backed into a corner by a twelve year old.

Several minutes later, Dustin was scribbling instructions onto a notepad as he listened closely to his teacher over the phone, nodding as he followed along.

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh? How much?" he nodded as Scott answered and he scratched out the amount onto the notepad. "Uh-huh. Yep, all right. Yeah, we'll be careful. Definitely. All right, Mr. Clarke. Yeah, I'll see you on Monday. I'll see you on Monday, Mr. Clarke. Bye."

He ended the call then looked immediately to Joyce and asked, "Do

you still have that kiddie pool we bobbed for apples in?"

"Uh, I think so. Yeah," Joyce replied looking to Jonathan for confirmation.

"Yeah," Jonathan confirmed.

"Good. Then we just need salt," nodded Dustin. "Lots of it."

"How much is lots?" asked Hopper.

Dustin took a moment to consult his notes. "Fifteen hundred pounds."

"Well, where are we gonna get that much salt?" griped Nancy.

Nearly a half hour later Hopper's truck and Joyce's car sped into the Hawkin's Middle School parking lot where they came to a stop right before the gymnasium. A few minutes later Hopper and Jonathan were busy loading up a cart with large bags of de-icing salt.

"Hey, wait," said Jonathan as he caught the bag of salt Hopper had tossed to him and loaded it onto the cart. "It's not gonna snow next week, is it?"

"Worst case, no school," Hopper grunted, as he tossed him yet another bag.

"Even if we find Will in there...what are we gonna do about that thing?" inquired Jonathan.

"We're not gonna do anything. I don't want you anywhere near this, all right? Your mom's been through enough already," said Hopper firmly.

"He's my brother," Jonathan complained.

"Listen to me. I'm gonna find him. All right?" Hopper broke from his gathering of the salt to grasp Jonathan's shoulder. "You gotta trust me on this. I am going to find him."

Hopper returned to gathering salt as Jonathan frowned in frustration. As honorable as Hopper's answer was it still did not answer his



question. What were they going to do about that monster? Sure cops were good at finding, and he believed Hopper could find Will before anyone else. But what good would Hopper be to anyone if that monster got him first? He glanced back just in time to catch the next bag of salt that Hopper threw his way.

---

In the center of the gymnasium floor Dustin rolled out the large kiddie pool as Lucas strode beside him.

"This damn thing is heavy," he grunted. Together he and Lucas untied the pool and spread it out.

"Come on. It's upside down," Dustin pointed out.

"No. this way. Okay, um..." Lucas suggested, but he quickly became confused with the layout.

Dustin struggled to make the pool sides stand on their own. "How does this thing even work?"

Lucas pointed at a section lying flat on the ground, and said, "Try that side."

However, as soon as Dustin let go of his section to grapple with the other it fell flat.

"Son of a bitch!" he exclaimed.

"Pull it back. Pull it back," Lucas ordered.

"I am!" Dustin snapped.

"One, two, three," counted Lucas and together they ballooned the pool up like a parachute in the hopes that it would stand straight upon landing. Unfortunately all the sides caved down as soon as it hit the ground.

"Shit!" yelled Dustin as Lucas held his hands up in reassurance as he once again bent to haggle with the pool.

---

Outside Nancy and Mike attempted to enter the school's maintenance house only to find the door padlocked shut. Glancing around Nancy walked off in search of a solution. Mike tried to open the door by throwing his shoulder against the door as he had seen on television.

"Ah," he moaned in pain and he backed off from the unharmed door, clutching his now aching arm.

"Stand back," Nancy ordered.

"What?" Mike asked as he glanced up at his sister. He watched in awe as she raised a large rock over her head and brought it smashing down onto the padlock. In that one smooth stroke the lock was broken and she removed it from the latch and kicked open the door.

"Whoa," said Mike, wide-eyed. He had never seen this side of his sister before. Calm and cool but with a look of steel in her eyes.

Turning on the lights Nancy glanced around and found several coils of hoses on a shelf in the back of the shed. She began pulling them down and dumping them into a wheelbarrow. As she rolled the barrow back to the gym, Mike paced beside her with a coil of hose looped through his arm.

She asked him curiously, "What did she even eat?"

"What?" Mike questioned, jarred from his thoughts.

"Eleven."

"Oh. Candy, leftovers, *Eggos*...She really likes *Eggos*," he said with a small smile.

"I knew you were acting weird. I just...I thought it was because of Will," admitted Nancy.

"I knew you were acting weird, too. I thought it was 'cause of Steve," Mike stated.

Nancy frowned as she thought about that moment in the car when Hopper and Joyce had asked for details about Mike. It had been unsettling to realize that she did not really know her brother. They

used to be so close. She set the barrow down.

"Hey..." she said and he paused and looked up at her. "No more secrets, okay? From now on we tell each other everything."

"Okay," shrugged Mike. "Do you like Jonathan now?"

Caught off guard Nancy stuttered, "What? No. no, it's...it's not...it's not like that."

Mike nodded slowly as if he was mulling over her answer so she asked him, "Do you like Eleven?"

Shocked Mike sputtered, "What? No. Ew. Gross."

He turned away and continued to walk to the gym and, smirking, Nancy picked up the barrow and followed after him.

---

From a cupboard in one of the science classrooms, Joyce pulled out a roll of duct tape and a pair of safety goggles. Eleven watched her closely as she sat across from her at one of the desks.

Her trembling hands sealed the tape over the clear plastic of the goggles and she said, "This will keep it dark for you. Just like in your bathtub."

Eleven nodded silently. Joyce paused as she considered the young girl. How often had this child done this? How often had she been forced to enter some unknown world at the request or demand of those looking out for her? Did she always nod silently when she was used like this? Joyce felt sick to her stomach that she was using her, too. She wished she could spare Eleven, but she needed to find her son, and this girl was her, and Will's, only hope.

"You're a very brave girl. You know that, don't you?" Joyce said delicately. Eleven glanced away uncomfortably but looked back to her as she continued. "Everything you're doing for my boy...for Will...for my family...Thank you."

Eleven's lips twitched as if trying to give her a reassuring smile but could not quite manage it. Joyce sensed it was not easy to make her

smile, and that she probably hardly ever did. She clasped Eleven's hands gently in her own. No matter the circumstances she was determined not to be like every other person who had used this child.

"Listen. I am gonna be there with you the whole time," Joyce told her. "And if it ever gets too scary...in-in that place, you just let me know, okay?"

Eleven didn't know how to respond to the woman's tenderness. She had never known anyone like her. She whispered, "Yes."

"Ready?"

Eleven sat straighter and with a deep, trembling breath she gathered every ounce of bravery in her and said, "Ready."

---

Grabbing the nozzles of two hoses, one in each hand, Nancy pulled them across the gym floor as the hose rollers spun. Arriving at the sinks in the locker rooms, she screwed the nozzles onto the taps. Turning the faucets on, Mike held the other ends of the hoses over the erected kiddie pool as the water began to fill it. As the height of the water rose Lucas monitored the temperature from a thermometer which he held in the water.

Glancing at the reading Lucas shouted in the direction of the locker rooms, "Colder!"

Nancy turned down the hot water and a few minutes later Lucas called out again, "Warmer!"

This time she turned down the cold water. Several more minutes passed and when the reading reached the desired temperature Lucas called out once more, "Right there!"

Lifting a bag of salt from the cart, Hopper and Jonathan held the bags over the water and ran their knives through the fabric. The salt spilled into the pool and once they had emptied several bags into the water Dustin pulled an egg from a carton and set it on the liquid surface. It sank to the bottom of the pool and they each shared a momentary look of disappointment before Hopper retrieved more

bags of salt and began pouring the contents into the water. Again, Dustin laid another egg on the surface, but this time it floated. Mike and Lucas patted Dustin on the back in satisfaction as he grinned with success.

On a cart next to the kiddie pool they had a towel ready for Eleven for when she finished her search in the Upside Down. Mike set a radio next to it and turned the dial until they heard nothing but steady static.

Eleven stood before the pool and nervously removed her shoes and socks. She also unclasped the watch from her wrist and handed it to Mike who placed it back on his own wrist. Joyce handed the duct taped goggles to Eleven. She pulled them over her eyes and exhaled slowly. Hopper and Joyce each held one of her arms and helped her step over the high wall of the kiddie pool, half lifting her in. Once she stood in the water on two feet, they released her and she squatted down as everyone else sat around the pool watching her closely and waiting.

Eleven leaned back into the water and put her arms out and her legs came up until she was floating on the surface as the egg had done. She lay in the silence of the gym, feeling nothing but her bed of water and seeing nothing but blackness. The electricity surged above their heads until the lights went out and the others all looked about in slight alarm. Hopper peered down at Eleven's form as she floated in the water.

Eleven opened her eyes and she was back in the void. Remembering the last time she had been here she tried to steady her breathing. Gazing around her she paced forward on the watery floor. She continued to scan the emptiness until she spotted something in the distance.

"Barb?"

Still waiting in the gym, watching the floating girl, the others heard Eleven whisper, "Barbara?"

Nancy leaned forward with apt attention, her pulse quickening in fear and hope.

With a deep, shaky breath Eleven inched forward. She came over what appeared to be a small mound. As she came closer, she noticed a wet, slimy sort of substance covering what appeared to be a body. Drawing nearer Eleven made out Barbara's face on what was left of her body. The skin was pale and the eyes and lips blue in death, and something slimy slid out of her mouth. Eleven leapt back in horror, her breaths turning panicked.

In the gym the electricity surged again, and Nancy asked fearfully, "What's going on?"

"I don't know," Mike replied.

Turning back to Eleven Nancy asked urgently, "Is Barb okay? Is she okay?"

Still in the void Eleven screamed in terror, "Gone! Gone! Gone!"

She turned on the spot terrified of the darkness around her, at the presence of death. She felt herself falling into hysterics and she held her head in her hands as she tried to banish the sight of Barb.

"Gone! Gone!" she screamed.

In a trembling voice Eleven said, "Gone. Gone. Gone."

Nancy's hand leapt to her face in horror and grief and she began to cry.

"It's okay. It's okay. It's okay," Joyce told Eleven as the girl grew more frantic.

"Gone. Gone!"

"It's okay. It's okay."

"Gone!" Eleven screamed in her lonely void.

Joyce and Hopper held each of her hands as Joyce said, "Hey, it's okay."

Floating in the water Eleven gasped and trembled in fear. Her small

hands clung to Joyce's and Hopper's as Joyce continued to comfort her.

"It's okay, we're right here. We're right, honey."

In the void Eleven listened to the echoing voice as it said, "It's okay. I got you. Don't be afraid. I'm right here with you."

She closed her eyes and forced herself to breathe calmly, concentrating on Joyce's comforting words and on Will.

Still holding onto her Joyce said, "It's okay. It's okay."

"It's okay. It's okay, you're safe. You're okay, honey," Joyce's voice echoed in the void. Eleven opened her eyes and saw before her a hut with an American flag hanging to the side. She dragged her eyes away from the bright colors of the stripes and read the sign over the entrance.

"Castle Byers."

"Castle Byers," said Eleven from the water, and Joyce quickly glanced at Jonathan who's heart pounded in fright.

Eleven walked toward the hut, feeling the water underfoot. An old crinkly sheet hung from the entrance and she pushed it aside to enter. She knelt beside the make-shift bed.

"Will."

"Will?" whispered Eleven in the pool. Joyce gasped and Jonathan stared in numb, shock.

Eleven stared down at the boy so pale and still that she thought he might be dead. But she could feel that he was still alive.

"You tell him...tell him I'm coming," Joyce said.

Joyce's voice echoed to Eleven in the void, "...Mom is coming."

Grasping his frozen hand in hers, Eleven said, "Your mom, s-she's coming for you."

Will struggled to open his eyes. He could not see anyone but he felt a presence, warm and gentle, beside him. He mumbled weakly, "H-hurry."

In the gym the unmistakable voice of Will came over the radio.

"Hurry."

Hopper turned to glance at it, then back to the girl in the water. Dustin and Lucas stared at one another in awe.

"Okay. Listen, you tell him to...to stay where he is. We're coming. We're coming, okay? We're coming, honey," Joyce said all the more urgently.

"Just - just hold on a little longer," Eleven told him. "Will. Will."

However, as Will fell unconscious Eleven realized that the hut around her was fading into smoke. She looked down at the boy before her and saw him begin to dissolve, his cold hand disappearing.

"Will? Will?" she whimpered in fright as the emptiness of the void surrounded her again.

The others listened and watched the girl, hearing her whimpers over the radio as well as from her. Suddenly, she sat straight up with a splash, the boys flinching back with a start. Joyce wrapped her arm around Eleven as she huddled against the pool's side. Eleven latched to Joyce, her nose bleeding, as she cried and trembled.

"I've got you. It's okay. I've got you. I've got you. I got you, honey. You did so good," Joyce kissed her forehead affectionately, "Are you okay?"

Everyone watched in silence as Joyce comforted the crying girl, stunned by all they had witnessed and learned.

A few minutes later Eleven sat on the bleachers with a towel wrapped around her. Her head rested tiredly on Mike's shoulder and Dustin gazed worriedly at her from Mike's other side. Lucas sat one seat above them and he reached down to pull the towel more securely over her and rubbed her arm in comfort.



Several feet away Hopper asked Joyce, "So this fort where is it?"

"Uh, it's in the woods behind our house," she answered him.

"Yeah, he used to go there to hide," Jonathan confirmed. Hopper walked off toward the exit and with a glance at one another Joyce and Jonathan stalked after him.

As they followed him outside Hopper took notice and commanded, "Hey, get back inside."

"What, are you insane? No i'm goin-" Joyce began, but Hopper interrupted.

"Look, if something happens to me, I don't make it back-"

Joyce cut across him this time, yelling, "Yeah, but then I'll go. You stay! Are you kidding me?" She scoffed. "He's my son, Hop. My son! I'm going!"

Hopper bit his lip in retort, frustrated, and Joyce turned her back to him to speak to Jonathan, "Now, listen, I need you to stay here..."

"No," Jonathan pleaded.

"...and watch over the kids."

"No, Mom. I can help. No!"

Joyce hugged him good-bye. "Please, I need you to stay, Jonathan."

Opening the door to his truck Hopper yelled, "Joyce!"

"Please," Joyce still reasoned with Jonathan.

"Please be careful," Jonathan begged her.

"Joyce, come on!" Hopper shouted impatiently.

"Please. I'm gonna find him. I'm gonna find him," Joyce promised as she climbed into the truck. The engine started and they sped away leaving Jonathan to wonder if he would ever see them again.

In the lobby of the gymnasium building Jonathan found Nancy sitting alone against the painted wall of an American flag and the school's mascot, a tiger. He walked over to her and turning his back to the wall slid down to sit beside her on the floor.

"We have to go back to the station," Nancy said after a moment.

"What?" he asked.

"Your mom and Hopper are just walking in there like bait. That thing is still in there," she pointed out emotionally. "And we can't just sit here and let it get them, too. We can't."

"You still wanna try it out?" he asked in regards to their earlier plan.

"I wanna finish what we started," she answered. Meeting his eyes, she said, "I want to kill it."

---

Outside of the Hawkin's lab fence, Hopper came to a stop at almost the exact same spot he had snuck in through the last time. Climbing out of his truck he marched up to the fence with his garden shears.

"So this is your plan?" asked Joyce incredulously.

"Worked for me before, didn't it?" Hopper responded.

Joyce watched doubtfully. "Well, did it?"

"Come on, trust me," he told her and he attacked the fence as he had the other night.

---

At the sheriff's station an officer sat smoking as he passed the time away with a deck of playing cards. The radio played a channel on which a man was saying, "I'd like to hear your thoughts on the war. I think we're dealing with a whole different environment here..."

To his utter ignorance Nancy and Jonathan quietly snuck into the building from behind him.

Jonathan quickly opened the door to Hopper's office and grabbed the

box of hunting supplies from the desk as Nancy kept watch. As they exited Nancy noticed the fire extinguisher latched opposite from her, and without a second thought, she stole it from the station wall.

---

In the grounds of Hawkin's lab, Joyce and Hopper hurried up to the building. Flood lights suddenly flashed on and Joyce gasped, startled.

"Don't move!" shouted an armed man as they spun around finding themselves surrounded by soldiers all armed with guns and flashlights aimed directly at them.

Muttering quietly to Joyce as they both raised their arms in surrender, Hopper said, "It's all right. Let me do the talking."

They waited as the men drew nearer to apprehend them.

---

On the wall of a fort made of sticks in a dark, cold world where dead flurries floated on the air, was a pencil sketch of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Lying on the makeshift bed was a pale, clammy boy shivering as he sang under his breath.

"And if I stay it will be double. So, come on and let me know. Should I stay or should I go now?"

A monster growled loudly from just outside the fort, and with a massive start, Will sat up straight. His eyes dilated in fear, his breath frozen, Will listened as the creature paced beside his hut. Through the branches of his hideout he caught glimpses of the monster as it passed. His breath came out trembling and heavy. He feared it would give him away, but the monster growled again and moved on. It was silent and Will listened for its return. Just when he began to think it was okay to lay back down the walls of his fort gave way as the monster invaded his hideout, and Will knew no more.

## 9. Chapter 8 - The Upside Down

### Chapter Eight - The Upside Down

Insects chirped out in the silent evening. It was another clear, starry night that looked over Hawkins Lab. The dark building loomed in the darkness like any other night, but the week's events had brought two new visitors to its walls.

"Let me out of here!"

In a cool, dim room Joyce sat handcuffed to a chair at an empty table. The wall on her left had a large mirror just like an interrogation room and she knew there were people on the other side who could see and hear her, so she screamed again as she struggled with her handcuffs, "Somebody, please! Let me out!"

Finally, she heard someone unlocking the door to the room and she became still and attentive. The door opened and a tall, white-haired man entered the room. The room was so dim that she could not make out his face. Turning away from her he paced in thought as he remained in shadow.

"Your son. We know you've been in contact with him," said Brenner.

"You have to let me-" Joyce began but Brenner neared her now and she could finally see him clearly as she stared pleadingly up at him.

"When...and how did you make contact with him?" he asked.

"What?" she asked appalled at his audacity.

"Hmm?" His eyebrows rose, and he whispered, "Six."

"What?" she asked again but in confusion and fear this time. What was this?

"Six," he said again and he paced over to the table as he removed his tunic. "Six people have been taken this week."

He placed his jacket over the back of the chair sitting across from her

and he leaned down before her peering straight into her eyes. She loathed everything about him. He allowed that monster into this world, kidnapped and experimented on children, and now he was keeping her from saving her son.

Unaware of the seething hate Joyce had for him Brenner continued, "This...thing that took your son...we don't really understand it. But its behavior is predictable. Like all animals..."

He paused with emphasis as he pulled the chair out and sat across from her. "It eats. It will take more sons. More daughters. I want to save them. I want to save your son. But I can't do that. Not without your help."

"Stop," Joyce replied with a look of disgust. "I know who you are. I know what you've done. You took my boy away from me! You left him in that place to die! You faked his death! We had a funeral. We buried him, and now you're asking for my help? Go to hell."

Brenner stared calmly back at the woman across from her, assessing what he saw in her eyes, and what he saw was immovable.

---

Hopper gritted his teeth in agony as electricity crackled from the taser held to him. Relinquishing him the security director stepped back and Hopper slumped to the floor in the corner of the interrogation room they had kept him in for the past hour. He gave a pained grunt as he panted for air.

"Okay, now what do you know?" asked the agent beside Connie. Both stared down at Hopper with a cold and calculating gaze.

"I'm sorry," Hopper apologized in mockery. "Did I stutter? I told you. Everything."

Hopper's body seized up in pain as electricity tortured his muscles from the taser that was once again held to him. Once it stopped he leaned forward and vomited on the floor.

"What do you know?" Connie asked with deep aggravation.

Hopper leaned back against the wall. His body was sore in a way it

had never been before.

"I know you do experiments on kidnapped little kids, whose parents' brains you've turned to mush," he answered. He peered up at her for a reaction but she merely stared back coldly so he continued. "And I know you went a little too far this time and you messed up in a big way. I mean, you really messed up, didn't you? Big time. That's why you're trying to cover your tracks."

With deep satisfaction Hopper saw Connie glance away and the agent's composure began to crack. He went on, "You killed Benny Hammond, you faked Will Byers' death. You made it look like that little girl just ran away. See, I told you. I know everything."

"All right, who are you working with?" the agent asked impatiently. He was getting to them and Hopper was determined to drag out the sting.

"Nobody. But I did give all this over to my friend at the *Times*. He's gonna blow this thing wide open," he laughed at the idea of their crimes exposed for the world to see, but his mirth quickly turned to a groan of torture as he was tazed again. Then, they yanked him from the floor and shoved him roughly into a chair.

The security director leaned down and muttered, "You're just a junkie. A small town cop who had a really bad week."

As he said it Connie's fellow agent began to prepare a syringe full of some clear solution.

"Took one too many pills this time," the director finished his threat.

Standing before him, Connie said, "You made a mistake coming back here."

Hopper's eyes gazed at nothing in particular as he steeled himself to make a deal with the devil.

"No I didn't," he said. "Here's what's gonna happen. You're gonna let me and Joyce Byers go...you're gonna give us anything we need, and we're gonna find her son."

Now, Hopper looked directly at her and said, "And then we're gonna forget that any of this ever happened."

"Oh, is that right?" she asked sardonically.

"Yeah. That's right."

---

In the Hawkins Middle School gymnasium, Eleven's head still rested on Mike's shoulder as she, Dustin and Lucas waited tiredly on the bleachers. But Mike was too anxious and jittery to allow himself to be tired. His leg jiggled with impatience as he looked at the gym's entrance. He glanced at his watch. Mike stood up from his seat and Eleven's head fell a few inches at the unexpected absence of his shoulder. She and the others watched as Mike ran across the gym.

In the building's lobby Mike called out, "Nancy? Jonathan?"

A moment later Mike stalked back into the gym and announced, "They're gone."

"What?" asked Lucas.

"Nancy and Jonathan," he explained. "His car's gone."

Dustin shrugged and said carelessly, "They're probably just sucking face somewhere."

"Gross," Lucas replied and Mike shook his head in disgust.

"No! No way!"

"Did they go with the chief?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know," Mike admitted, feeling clueless.

"No," said Eleven. The boys looked at her in surprise.

"What? Did you see them?" Mike asked her. "Do you know where they went?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Where? Where did they go?"

She gave him a significant look and said, "Demogorgon."

---

Jonathan sped up the driveway to his house before screeching to a stop in front of the porch. He and Nancy climbed out of the car and headed straight back to the trunk where Jonathan opened it and removed the box of hunting supplies as Nancy retrieved the gas canister and stolen fire extinguisher. Nancy shut the trunk with a loud slam and once inside the house they dropped the items to the living room floor. Jonathan gazed silently at Nancy and she knew he was asking if she was ready to begin. With the same intuition Jonathan read her answering glance as being more than ready. So they began.

They started by hurriedly replacing each bulb to every lamp in the house and every Christmas light to the cords strung up through the wrecked home. Then, they prepared for battle. Nancy watched as Jonathan nailed the bear trap into the floor midway down the hallway to the bedrooms. He pulled on the contraption to check for stability and when it did not budge he turned and nodded at her, Nancy responding in kind.

Next, Nancy calmly loaded Lonnie's gun with the ammunition Jonathan had bought imagining, as she did so, planting each one into the monster that had took Barb. Then she went into the hall and carefully poured gasoline from the canister in a trail from the bear trap to Will's bedroom. Jonathan searched for and eventually found one of his mother's cigarette lighters. He checked that it could produce flame then headed back to the living room where he hammered the remaining nails into the end of the baseball bat Nancy had brought from her family's garage. With a final smash of the hammer, Jonathan threw it down onto the coffee table and examined the bat. The long lengths of the nails stuck out from different sides around the bat creating a formidable swinging weapon. In Will's room, Jonathan placed a bright, yellow yoyo with a smiling face over the back of a chair. He took its string and it stretched it from the chair to the door tying the end around the doorknob.

Finally, he and Nancy met in the hall to set the trap. This was the



part they were most nervous about in their preparations because one wrong move meant a serious injury as well as an invitation to the creature. Nancy used her body weight to hold the springs steady as Jonathan pulled the jaws of the trap open. Once they were in the fully open state she attached the pin to the pan. Then, very slowly Jonathan let go of the jaws as Nancy eased off the springs. The springs did not activate and the jaws remained in its ready state. Taking deep breaths they leaned against the hall walls opposite from each other. Jonathan peered up at Nancy and she gave him a nod. The trap was set.

---

Hopper sat alone in the dim interrogation room, which he now termed "torture chamber". The door opened and Brenner entered. The scientist paused as he gazed down at Hopper then he paced past him. As he did so he pulled out a crumbled pack of cigarettes and gave it to Hopper who took it without question, and pulled out a lighter and cigarette from inside. He placed the cigarette between his lips and lit it.

Without any pretense, Brenner asked, "Where's the girl?"

Hopper inhaled deeply before breathing out releasing a breath of smoke.

"You gotta give me your word," he replied. "Nobody's ever gonna find out about this. And those other three kids, those boys, you're gonna leave them alone. Then I'll tell you. Tell you where your little science experiment is."

His voice dropped off and as he thought about what he was doing, the price he was paying to save Will, his stomach churned and he took another swig from his cigarette, hating himself.

---

Joyce struggled with the handcuffs waiting for something to happen when the door once again opened. She expected to see Brenner, but instead a disheveled and exhausted Hopper came through the doorway. Clearly, his treatment had been far worse than hers. Her mouth gaped open and she was about to ask him if he was okay when two MPs followed him in. One came over to her and released her

from her restraints. They were then escorted through Hawkins lab by several soldiers.

"I don't understand," Joyce whispered to Hopper.

"We came to an agreement," Hopper said as he stared straight ahead with a dull feeling in his chest.

"What?"

"Look, everything that's happened here and everything that's gonna happen, we don't talk about," he explained. "You want Will back? This place had nothing to do with it. That's the deal. You got it?"

Joyce felt that he was keeping something from her, something more, but she decided not to press him. They were directed to a side room and Hopper noticed two large hazmat suits hanging from a coat hanger.

"What is this?" he asked to anyone in general.

One of the scientist's answered. "Protection. The atmosphere is toxic."

"But my son's in there. He..." Joyce's voice faded out as she tried to decipher what they meant by toxic. Obviously, it was breathable or Will would not have survived all this time. But what condition would he be in when she found him? How sick could this place make a person?

Hopper lifted one of the suits off the rack and said, "Put it on."

Beneath the lab the elevator doors opened and Joyce and Hopper stepped out in their bulky suits. Holding flashlights they illuminated the dark, drafty hall. Hopper felt a shiver race through his battered body, and Joyce eyed the dead flakes floating on the air with trepidation. Dead vines crawled up the walls and the lights flickered in proximity to a world so different from their own. Together, they set out with a steady pace.

---

An army of government agents and US military soldiers marched out of Hawkins lab along with Connie and Brenner.

"I'm telling you this is a mistake," Connie told her boss.

"It's gone. Isn't that what you wanted?" Brenner asked.

"And if they find the boy?" she asked.

"That's not gonna happen," he said dismissively. The men and Frazier loaded into their vehicles which included several unmarked black cars and army trucks. The driver in Brenner's vehicle set out, and one by one they followed its lead.

---

Joyce and Hopper stood before the gate of the Upside Down observing the dim glow pulsing from it and they heard a distinct growling emanate from the portal itself. They looked to one another wondering the same thing, but then Hopper slowly started forward and Joyce followed. They pushed through the strange substance and as they moved deeper into the fabric of that terrible dimension the web-like threads shivered before mending themselves back into place.

In the Upside Down, Joyce and Hopper made their way out of the dead building of Hawkin's lab. They took in the sight of the dead trees before them and Joyce began to gasp for air in her suit. Hopper placed a hand on her arm while keeping a steady grip on his weapon.

"Hey, you alright?" he asked.

"Yeah," breathed Joyce.

"I need you to relax, okay?" he told her. "I want you to slow down your breathing, take deep breaths. In and out. Deep breath in...and out. In and out."

He kept his hand on her shoulder as he guided her through the breathing technique, and slowly they continued forward. Joyce slowed her breathing as they traveled forward, and as Hopper encouraged her he found himself thinking of another world. One much happier where Will was not lost and monsters didn't exist, and he had been happy. A world where he had his little girl.

---

*A little blonde girl with pigtails ran giggling and laughing as her daddy*

*chased her across the grass.*

*"It's a troll's favorite food! Princess!" Hopper snarled and he snatched the happy child into the air.*

*"No, daddy! No daddy!" squealed Sarah in ecstatic glee.*

*"Roasted princess with paprika and gravy!" growled Hopper.*

*"No! No daddy, no daddy."*

*Hopper growled playfully as he pretended to eat her, his wife coming up beside him laughing at the pair, but then he caught sight of Sarah's face. She was no longer smiling and her eyes were wide as she struggled to breathe.*

*"Whoa, hey! Hey. you alright?" he asked in alarm.*

*"What's going on?" Hopper's wife asked as she saw her daughter's expression.*

*"Whoa. I don't know. I don't know," he answered worriedly.*

*"What happened? What happened?" his wife asked again as she examined Sarah's profile.*

*Hopper placed her back on the ground, standing her before him, and he crouched beside his wife as they watched Sarah. He was growing very concerned by her breathing.*

*"Hey, you alright?" he asked again. Sarah's eyes danced around in alarm as if she was searching for something to help her. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, relax, relax. Honey, just breathe. Breathe, breathe, breathe. In and out. Slow, slow, slow."*

*Staring into her daddy's eyes Sarah inhaled deeply. It seemed to help so Hopper continued to coach her. "In and out with me. In..."*

---

*Hopper pushed the painful memory aside and turned to Joyce. "You okay?"*

"Yeah. Yeah," she answered shakily. Hopper gave her a thumbs up to be double sure and she nodded in confirmation.

He turned his focus on the dead forest ahead and gathering his gun in both hands he eased forward into the unknown.

---

Jonathan opened a kitchen drawer and pulled out two steak knives. Turning to Nancy, he handed her one of the knives and said, "Remember..."

Nancy interjected, "Straight into Will's room. And-"

"Don't step on the trap," Jonathan warned.

"Wait for the yoyo to move," she continued through their plan.

"Then..." he lit the lighter he held in his hand. "All right. You ready?"

"Ready," Nancy said nervously.

Standing opposite from one another they held out their right hands, palms up. They both held the sharp edges of their knives over their palms.

"On three," Jonathan suggested. He began the countdown. "One..."

He looked up at Nancy who was already cringing and trembling from what she was about to do.

"Two," he said, but as he continued to stare at her face he shook his head unwilling to see her in pain. "You don't have to do this-"

"Jonathan, stop talking," Nancy ordered.

"I'm just saying, you don't have to-"

"Three," Nancy spat out and together they pressed the knives into their hands, sliding the sharp edges through their skin. Dark, red blood spilled out from the deep cuts.

---

"Guys, guys! This is crazy. We can't just wait around," Mike griped to Dustin and Lucas.

Eleven listened to the boys argue as she sat on the bleachers. Her arms were wrapped around her knees which she had drawn up close to her and she had discarded the damp towel now that she was mostly dry, although she still wore Hopper's plaid button up shirt over her dress. She thought about how he had helped her out of the pool and, after Joyce helped wring out as much of the water from her dress and towel dried her, he had wordlessly taken his shirt and wrapped it over her shoulders quickly followed by the towel. The shirt was almost as long as the dress and she had needed to roll up the sleeves in order to use her hands, but for some odd reason she could not identify the shirt meant a great deal to her.

"Mike, in case you forgot, we're still fugitives," Lucas was saying. "The bad men are still looking for us."

"Yeah, and we don't even know where your sister is," Dustin reasoned.

"El can find them," Mike argued. Why did they not understand? His sister and Jonathan were going to fight that monster; they were in danger.

"Mike, look at her," Dustin gestured at Eleven and Mike turned back to glance at her. Somewhat realizing they were talking about her she rotated her head on her knees to look at them, but they seemed out of focus while her thoughts dwelled on the chief.

Dustin continued, "I still think we should stick to the chief's plan."

"Exactly," agreed Lucas quickly. "We stay here, keep El out of sight and keep her safe. That's the most important thing, remember? Besides, she's okay. She's with Jonathan."

"Yeah, and she's kind of a badass now, so..." Dustin shrugged and, turning away from the rest of the group, he slumped toward the gymnasium exit.

"Well, where are you going?" Mike asked. "You just said stick to the

plan!"

"I am!" Dustin called back. "I'm just gonna go get some chocolate pudding. I'm telling you, Lunch Lady Phyllis hoards that shit."

"Are you serious?" Mike yelled in exasperation. Lucas however, followed after Dustin.

"El needs to be recharged!" Dustin called as he exited the gym.

Jogged from her thoughts Eleven stood, unsure if she and Mike would be following. He turned to check on her again before turning back and staring after his all-too reasonable friends.

---

All was quiet as Jonathan watched Nancy wrap his hand with Ace bandage. He had insisted on wrapping hers first. The porch swing creaked in the breeze and Nancy quickly glanced up, her eyes roaming the living room for a sign of the monster.

"Did you hear that?" she asked. He listened with her, but he was familiar with the sounds of his home.

"It's just the wind," he reassured her. She turned back to him and their eyes met for a second before she resumed wrapping his hand looking concerned. He added, "Don't worry. My mom, she said the lights speak when it comes. "

"Speak?"

"Blink. Think of them as alarms."

She nodded then, tying off the end of the bandage, she asked, "Is that too tight?"

"No, i-it's fine. Thanks," he stuttered as she secured it with medical tape.

Nancy realized she liked holding his hand in hers. They were soft and gentle but somehow strong at the same time. With a feathery light touch she caressed his hand. Her fingers brushed along his and she paused hoping for more. Jonathan's fingers began to enclose her hand

in his. She had never felt so calm, which was saying something considering what they were here to do.

Jonathan however felt nervous. He looked up at her and for the first time he allowed himself to really appreciate how beautiful she was. He had always thought she was but he knew she'd never go for him so he buried the thought away, somewhere far where it could not hurt him. But now, with a monster on its way, and very possibly a gruesome death, he may never have another chance to tell her exactly how he felt about her.

"Nancy?"

Her wide eyes darted to his face. "Yeah?"

She was staring up at him, looking, was it hopeful? He wasn't sure, but he found the words stuck in his throat. Working up the courage he began to speak again.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Nancy and Jonathan leapt in fright at the sudden loud noise, their heads snapping toward the front door where someone, or something, had just pounded on the door.

"Jonathan? Are you there, man? It's...it's Steve!" called Steve Harrington. Nancy and Jonathan shared a bewildered glance. "Listen, I just want to talk!"

He knocked again. Quickly pacing over to the door, Nancy pulled the chain from its holder and cracked the door open. Steve stood there looking at his feet, his face badly bruised from the beating he had taken the day before.

"Steve, listen to me..." she began.

Steve's relief turned to confusion as he saw Nancy rather than Jonathan. "Hey. Nancy, what-?"

"You need to leave," she told him sternly.

"I'm not trying to start anything, okay?" Steve told her quickly a wave



of remorse flowing through him.

"I don't care about that," she told him quickly. It was imperative that he leave before the monster appeared. Too many lives were already in the balance, she was unwilling to add Steve to that list. "You need to leave."

"No, no, no. Listen, I-I-I-I'm I I messed up, okay? I messed...I messed up," Steve said with struggle. He so badly wanted to make her understand how sorry he was. How he had thought of nothing but how he had treated her and Jonathan. How stupid he felt that he had really believed she was cheating on him with Jonathan at a time like this, when her best friend was missing and his kid brother was dead. Too late he realized she must have turned to Jonathan for help finding Barb, probably believing her disappearance was connected to Will's. It was so clear, and yet at the time he was too selfish to see it. Now, he knew what he had done and he wanted to make it right.

He continued gently, "Okay? Really. Please. I'm trying to make things right. Okay? Please. Plea-"

He broke off as he suddenly noticed her hand. "Wh...hey, what happened to your hand? Is that blood?"

He grabbed her hand in order to take a closer look but she snatched it away. He examined his hand and found blood.

Now Nancy stuttered, "N-nothing. I-it was an accident."

"Yeah, what's going on?" he asked with growing concern.

"Nothing."

"Wait a sec. Did he do this to you?" he asked with great suspicion. He forced his way into the house despite her protests.

"No. no! No, Steve!" Nancy shoved back at him trying to keep him from entering.

"Nancy let me in!" he griped and sidestepping her he stumbled into the Byers' living room. His eyes landed first on Jonathan who stood by the couch staring him down. However, his eyes soon began to

travel over the rest of the house and he grew more bewildered as he took in the sight of the alphabet painted on the wall behind Jonathan, a baseball bat lying on the coffee table with nails sticking out of the end, Christmas lights dangling from the walls and ceiling. Furniture was overturned and random items littered the floor and a hole in the wall was half-boarded up.

"What is...what the..."

Jonathan rushed forward and made to shove him back toward the door, saying, "You need to get out of here."

Holding his place Steve protested, "Whoa. What is all-"

"Listen to me," Jonathan said, his voice rising. "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you get out of here!"

"What is that smell?" Steve shoved Jonathan from him as his senses began to pick up more. "Is that...is that gasoline?"

It became clear to Nancy that Steve was not going to leave without a fight, so she marched to the coffee table and grabbed the pistol. Aiming it directly at him, she shouted, "Steve, get out!"

"Whoa!" Steve yelped in shock as Jonathan leapt aside. He stepped back with his arms raised in front of him in surrender. "W-w-wait! What? What is going on?"

"You have five seconds to get out of here!" she hollered.

"O-o-okay, is this a joke?" Steve's mind was going wild as he tried to understand the scene before him. "Stop! P-put the gun down."

"I'm doing this for you," Nancy told him. She was so focused on forcing Steve to safety that she failed to notice the many lights flickering throughout the house.

"Nancy," Jonathan said as he watched the lights.

"Wait. Is this a...what is this?" Steve could not believe Nancy was holding him at gunpoint, and what the hell was going on with the lights?

"Nancy," said Jonathan again as he scanned the walls for any monsters bursting through.

"Three!..." Nancy counted down.

"No, no, no!" Steve yelled in horror.

"Two!"

"No, no!"

"Nancy!" Jonathan screamed. Her attention finally diverted she glanced at him. "The lights!"

She spun on the spot and marveled at the dancing lights. Jonathan rushed forward and snatched the bat from the coffee table.

"It's here!" he said.

Relieved that Nancy had finally lowered the gun Steve looked between the two. "Wait, what's here?"

But Nancy paid him no attention and instead asked Jonathan. "Where is it?"

"Where is what? Whoa!" Steve flinched as he saw Jonathan wield the bat. "Easy with that!"

Nancy and Jonathan were now back to back circling in place as they searched the walls around them.

"Where is it?" Nancy asked in fearful anticipation.

"I don't know! I don't see it!" Jonathan replied.

Steve was quickly growing frustrated; something insane was clearly going on. "Where is what? Hello? Will someone please explain to me what the hell is going-!"

Steve's words died instantly in his throat as a thunderous crashing erupted from the ceiling. The plaster was crumbling and breaking away and something seemed to be coming through. As they watched

a faceless head emerged from the forming hole. Nancy quickly recovered from her shock and began shooting at the hideous beast.

"No!" shouted Jonathan and he wrapped his arm around her waist, dragging her back. "Go! Go! Run! Go! Get out of here!"

He grabbed a stunned Steve's arm and dragged him too as he and Nancy darted back to Will's bedroom. Steve stumbled in his haste to follow and watched as the creature fell from the ceiling, landed on its feet, before its face opened up to reveal countless rows of predatory teeth and it roared at the retreating teenagers. In that moment, Steve thought he might piss his pants.

"Jump!" Jonathan hollered to Steve as first Nancy and then he leapt over the bear trap. Jonathan's command had barely registered in Steve's mind and instinct must have taken over because he found himself following suit and leaping into the air over the contraption.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!" Steve chanted in terror. The door to Will's room slammed shut as soon as Steve had crossed the threshold. "Jesus! Jesus! What the hell was that? What the hell was that?"

Nancy and Jonathan spun to face him and yelled simultaneously, "Shut up!"

The monster roared again and Jonathan lifted the bat and lit the cigarette lighter as Nancy aimed the gun at the door. The only sounds they made were the panting of their breaths. They waited.

"What's it doing?" asked Nancy.

"I don't know," Jonathan answered. They stared at the smiling yoyo, but it did not move. The flickering electricity surged with power then became stable once more. They gave each other an uncertain glance.

Nancy asked, "Do you hear anything?"

"No," answered Jonathan as he released the starter on the lighter, the flame going out. Very slowly they opened the door to Will's bedroom. Jonathan led the way out into the hall, the bat raised high, ready to strike. Steve followed closely on Nancy's heels. Their eyes were wide

as they searched for the monster, but all they saw was the untouched bear trap in the dark and empty hall.

---

Joyce and Hopper strolled uneasily across the dead ground of the Upside Down. Never had they seen such a place. Everything about it screamed death and horror. Hopper noticed something lighter than the rest of the dead trees around him so he paced over to examine the object. What he found gave him a chill. It appeared to be the abandoned shell of a very large egg or cocoon about the size of his chest. What sort of creature was born in an egg that size?

Further past Hopper, Joyce searched for the dead version of her son's fort. She knew they must be close but she could not make out any structures between the trees. Her flashlight roamed over the ground and it suddenly illuminated an American flag crumbled among debris. She scanned the scraps of debris and found the sign titled "Castle Byers".

With a jolt Joyce lurched forward shouting, "Will! Will!"

Hopper jerked upright and hurried to catch up with Joyce, the shell forgotten behind him. He found her searching the ruins of Will's fort which lay scattered across the ground as if demolished by a tornado. Hopper felt a sick feeling overtake him.

"Will! Will!" shouted Joyce with careless abandon. Hopper meant to ask her to be quiet, and avoid drawing any unwanted predators their way, but then he found the dirty remains of a stuffed lion and was forcibly reminded of a stuffed tiger he had given to his daughter years before.

---

*Hopper sat beside Sarah in her hospital bed, his arm wrapped securely around her shoulders as he read her favorite book, Anne of Green Gables, for about the twentieth time. Her mother sat in a chair gazing at them tearfully.*

*"I asked Mrs. Spencer what made them red and she said she didn't know and for pity's sake not to ask her any more questions. She said I must have asked her a thousand already. I suppose I had, too, but how are you*

*gonna find things out if you don't ask questions? And what does make roads red?"*

*'Well, I don't know', said Matthew. It just makes me feel glad to be alive..."*

*Hopper paused here as the words seem to cut his very heart. "...it's such an interesting world."*

*He pressed a tender kiss on her forehead, her light, blonde curls gone after weeks of treatments. When he found time to slip away he left Sarah with her mother before making his way to an abandoned staircase where, unable to go any further, he collapsed to the floor and sobbed.*

---

Hopper tore his gaze from that stuffed toy and watched as Joyce screamed out again, "Will!"

He could not see another mother lose her child. He could not afford to fail. Not again.

He stood and called out into the dark, "Will!"

---

Jonathan and Nancy crept into the living room, bat and gun at the ready, but the beast was nowhere to be seen. Steve followed the pair in a low crouch, his heart pounding. Jonathan looked up at the ceiling where the creature had come through but found it whole and undamaged. Nancy peered around the quiet home.

"This is crazy," Steve was muttering to himself. "This is actually crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy! This is crazy! This is crazy!"

Steve's mutters quickly became a hysterical chant and he snatched the phone off the wall and attempted to dial the emergency number, but Nancy yanked the phone from him and threw it to the floor.

"What are you do- what are you doing? Are you insane?" Steve cried wildly.

"It's going to come back!" she snarled at him. "So you need to leave.

Right now."

Steve stared blankly at her, then at the madness that was the house, then at Jonathan. Seconds later, he burst out from the front door. It swung closed behind him and he sped for his car. He was moving so quickly that he actually had to skid to a stop by his car and he fumbled in his jeans pocket for the keys. He pulled them out successfully but his trembling fingers dropped them in the dirt. He stooped and hastily retrieved them. Standing he looked all around him, feeling as if the very forest would come alive and attack him. The hairs on the back of his neck tingling in fear, he clumsily unlocked his car door and began to climb into the cab. However, before he had even got one foot into the vehicle he caught sight of the house. Lights flickered and blinked wildly in the windows. It was back. And in that moment the only thing Steve heard was Tommy yelling at him to "Run away, like you always do."

Nancy and Jonathan once again stood back to back as they rotated on the spot searching for the monster.

"Where is it?" Nancy asked.

"Come on. Come on, you son of a bitch," Jonathan muttered aloud. "You see it?"

"No. Where-?" Nancy started, but the lights blinked so fast it was too difficult to see anything for very long.

"Come on. Where are you? Come on!" hollered Jonathan desperately.

Suddenly, the lights cut out completely and a frightened whimper escaped Nancy. A low growling sounded from somewhere behind them and spinning on the spot Nancy spotted the monster looming tall behind Jonathan.

"Jonathan!" she cried out.

The creature leapt on him and he grunted loudly as he fell hard to the floor. The impact caused him to lose his grip on the baseball bat which rolled out of reach.

"Jonathan! Jonathan!" Nancy screamed.

The creature's faceless head opened inches before Jonathan's face and his eyes widened in sheer terror as his field of vision was dominated by row after row of sharp teeth. He smelled blood, meat and rot on its breath. The smell of death.

Gunshots rang out as Nancy shot at the creature again.

"Go to hell, you son of a bitch!" she shouted.

Angered by the gunshots the creature stood facing Nancy and it roared as Jonathan vomited from the overwhelming stench. Nancy grew terrified now that it was targeting her and she empty her clip into the monster. But the bullets had little to no effect on the tough skin of the Demogorgon. It roared at her and she backed off out of options.

However, the monster pursued her and she was suddenly hit with the realization that she was going to die. There was nothing she could do as the beast leapt forward to attack. But out of nowhere someone suddenly stood between her and the monster. He struck the creature with the bat as hard as he could, burying the nails into the thick skin and it turned, distracted by the entrance of this new enemy.

"Steve!" Nancy hollered in shock.

The Demogorgon lashed at him, but Steve ducked as if it were a boxing match. He backed away leading the monster away from the others. He swung the bat again aiming for its midriff. The monster roared in pain as the nails dug deep once again. Steve made a few wild swings while keeping distance between himself and the monster, and then, lit by the flickering of dozens of lights Steve twirled the bat easily in his hand as if it were a baton. And like nothing more than striking a homerun, Steve hit the creature hard. It recoiled in pain backing away from Steve and the deadly weapon he wielded. However, its angry roar suddenly transformed into agonizing shrieks as it stepped directly into the beartrap.

"He's in the trap! He's stuck!" Steve bellowed.

"Jonathan now!" screamed Nancy and running forward Jonathan stood before the creature that had taken his brother. Nancy and Steve



watched, the latter holding his bat high and ready, as Jonathan lit the lighter and threw it to the floor. Flames ignited over the gasoline and the monster was quite thoroughly on fire and shrieking in awful pain.

---

Hopper and Joyce paused in their search of Will as they heard a strange screeching from far off.

Joyce turned to Hopper and asked, "Did you hear that?"

Together they headed toward the sound.

---

Nancy and Steve continued to watch the torture of the Demogorgon as Jonathan ran off into another room. But he soon returned carrying the stolen fire extinguisher.

"Get back!" he ordered the others and, pulling the pin and aiming the nozzle, he successfully extinguished the fire.

Thick, putrid smoke filled the hall and the three teenagers coughed and spluttered as they tried to adjust to the newfound darkness. Once the smoke dissipated they inched forward, Steve still ready with his bat.

"Where'd it go?" asked Nancy.

But Jonathan shook his head, panting. "No. It has to be dead. It has to be"

They came to the bear trap and, successful though they were, the monster was not there.

---

Joyce and Hopper stopped short by the dead version of a very familiar house.

"Come on," said Hopper.

"Is that my house?" whispered Joyce. Will had been right. It was just like home but dark, cold and empty. She shivered as they entered the

house through the back door. It creaked open to reveal an interior just like outside. Dead vines running across the floorboards and up the walls, and flakes floating on the air.

---

Jonathan let out a breath as a few of the Christmas lights lit up. At first he thought it might be the monster, but as he watched he realized this time was different. The lights did not flash wildly but lit up like a trail. Slowly, one at a time. The three teens nervously backed away as they watched the lights, puzzled.

---

Hopper and Joyce edged down the dark hallway of her cloned house. The beam of Hopper's flashlight shone over a scorch mark on the filthy carpet. Was that something that existed in their world? Or was it a feature of the Upside Down?

He looked past the mark and down the hall seeing some sort of fluid. Blood. It led from the hall to the front of the house and ultimately out the front door. Joyce and Hopper steadily followed the trail.

---

Jonathan, Nancy and Steve watched the lights, saying nothing, though the latter panted, his adrenaline high. The bright, little lights continued to flicker on, forming a trail that led from the hall to the front door of the house. After a quick glance at each other they stalked forward to follow.

As Jonathan watched the lights in wonder he felt a warm presence as if the heat from the lights were warming him. It reminded him of the feeling he had when he was near his mother.

"Mom," he breathed.

---

"Is that you? Mom?"

Joyce spun around as she heard Jonathan's soft voice. It was barely a whisper but she was sure she had heard him.

"Jonathan?" she called back.

Hopper turned to see why Joyce was no longer with him and he saw her hesitating in the front doorway. "Joyce, come on!"

Slowly, she turned away from the house and followed Hopper, wondering if she would ever see the owner of that voice again.

---

Jonathan stepped out onto the front porch. Steve and Nancy followed and noticed the street lamp was now flickering.

"Where's it going?" asked Nancy.

"I don't think that's the monster," Jonathan answered, and Nancy gazed at him curiously.

---

The door to a large commercial refrigerator opened revealing a shelf stocked with individualized milk cartons and beneath them several cans of chocolate pudding.

Dustin grinned triumphantly. "Found it! I knew she was hoarding it. I knew it."

"Yeah," Lucas replied gleefully as he and Dustin began raiding the pudding.

"Always lying, saying she's out. Bald-faced liar," Dustin turned and bellowed over his shoulder. "Mike, I found the chocolate pudding!"

"Okay!" Mike shouted from a bench in the cafeteria where he sat facing Eleven. He asked her, "Are you feeling any better?"

She gave a small, noncommittal shrug, then asked curiously, "What's 'putting'?"

Mike smirked. "Pudding. It's...it's this chocolate goo you eat with a spoon."

Eleven pulled a face. If she were being honest, it did not sound very appetizing.

"Don't worry, when all this is over, you won't have to keep eating

junk food and leftovers like a dog anymore," Mike assured her. "My mom, she's a pretty awesome cook. She can make you whatever you like."

"Eggos?" she inquired hopefully.

"Well, yeah, *Eggos*, but real food, too," he sighed not wanting to scare her off then plunged on. "See, I was thinking, once all this is over and Will's back and you're not a secret anymore, my parents can get you an actual bed for the basement. Or you can take my room if you want, since I'm down there all the time anyways. My point is, they'll take care of you. They'll be like your new parents, and Nancy, she'll be like your new sister."

"Will you be like my brother?"

"What? No, no!" he shook his head quickly, hoping deeply that she did not think of him like her brother.

"Why no?" she asked, confused by his reaction.

"Because... 'cause it's different," he replied mystically and to his horror he felt his face grow hot.

"Why?"

Mike felt close to panic as he tried to think of a way to climb out of this hole he had dug himself into. "I mean, I don't know, I guess it's not. It's stupid."

"Mike?"

He looked up hopefully. "Yeah?"

"Friends don't lie."

He sighed again, realizing she was not going to let him off the hook very easily. "Well...I was thinking...I don't know...maybe we can to the Snow Ball together."

"Snow Ball?" she repeated.

"It's this cheesy school dance, where you go in the gym and dance to music and stuff. I've never been, but I know you're not supposed to go with your sister," he explained rather forcefully.

Eleven struggled to understand. "No?"

"I mean...you can, but it'd be really weird. You go to a school dance with someone that, you know...someone that you like," Mike clarified and he resisted the urge to bury his face in his arms.

"A friend?" she asked uncertainly wondering why Mike seemed so uncomfortable and why it was so hard for him to explain to her.

"Not a friend. Uh...uh...uh, someone like a..." he glanced around casting for an answer that would help her understand. How in the world could he explain this? Would she laugh or leave in disgust? She did not know many words and he doubted she would understand if he said the words. Maybe he could show her?

As soon as this thought occurred to him his palms grew sweaty and his heart beat wildly. Did he dare? Mike looked at Eleven and gathered every bit of courage he possessed and leaning forward he quickly pressed his lips to Eleven's and kissed her. He leaned back and stared wide-eyed at her, shocked at what he had just done. At Mike's kiss Eleven had sat up straight and alert, a renewed energy coursing through her such that she had never known. Energy coursing through her normally drained her but this seemed to fill her, strengthen her. The corners of her mouth lifted in a smile.

Mike smiled in relief and sat back. He did not know what to say or if it was necessary to speak anymore but he felt instinctively that something had shifted in his life. That kiss had been like a key that opened a door and all he could do was sit there in wonder. Suddenly, he noticed headlights through the cafeteria windows above their heads.

"Nancy. Hold on, I'll be right back. Stay here," he told Eleven and he ran off to meet his sister. Eleven watched him go, still thrilling from his kiss.

Mike pushed the front doors of his school open and looked across the

lot at the gymnasium but it was not Jonathan's car that he saw. Several unmarked black cars and military trucks pulled up by the gym, tires screeching. He watched in horror as soldiers and agents leapt out of the vehicles wielding guns and yelling commands at one another as they surrounded the building.

In the cafeteria Dustin and Lucas dropped well over twenty cans of pudding on the table in front of Eleven.

"This will charge your battery right up, I'm telling you," Dustin informed her excitedly as Mike burst back into the cafeteria.

"Guys! Guys!"

"What is it?" Lucas asked as he took in Mike's panicked form.

"They found us," Mike stated.

Agents ran stealthily up and down the halls of the school one assuring the others, "We know they're here."

The men moved through the building in search of the children.

"Be advised, west side of the building is clear," came an update.

In the gym Brenner, Connie and several soldiers came to a stop before the kiddie pool filled with what appeared to be water.

"Sir, we've searched everywhere. There's no sign of them," an agent informed Brenner. Brenner internally decided the man would be dismissed immediately following this mission. They were here. He was sure of it.

Brenner's men searched classrooms, the AV room, and the cafeteria where the pudding lay abandoned on a table.

Carefully avoiding sight by the agents Lucas, Dustin, Mike, and Eleven snuck through the halls.

"How did they find us?" Lucas whispered, his heart in his throat.

"I don't know, but they knew we were in the gym," Mike responded.

"Lando," shot Dustin.

Lucas led their march to the exit at the end of the hall, but before they reached it the doors burst open and agents began to spill in, one shouting, "Got 'em!"

The kids turned and ran in the opposite direction as Mike shouted, "Go, go, go, go, go!"

"Come on!" Lucas shouted.

They leapt up the stairs taking two at a time before bursting through another hall, but more men came running from around the corner shouting, "There they are! Freeze!"

"Back! Go back!" screamed Mike. The children darted back the way they came Mike continuing to shout instructions, "Go, go! Go left!"

However, at the end of this hall Connie Frazier and even more agents blocked their path, trapping them. They skidded to a halt. Connie and the men raised their guns and Mike and his friends could do nothing but stare and wait in defeat, yet Eleven was calm. She cleared her mind and focused. She felt the energy in the room, the heart beats, the panting breaths of the boys and men. She could sense everything in that hall. Lights flickered and her nose began to bleed. She was not the only one bleeding however. The boys watched in astonishment as Connie and the men stood frozen in their spots, blood streaming from their eyes, noses, and ears. Their guns were held uselessly in their trembling hands and some of the men moaned quietly from whatever agony Eleven was inflicting on them. Eleven did not release them, but continued her onslaught until, with a sickening crunch, the agents dropped as a unit to the ground, their brains crushed in their skulls. A second later Eleven collapsed to the floor as well.

Panicked the boys dropped down beside her and they were shocked to see how pale, gray, and clammy she was.

"El, are you okay? El!" Mike gave her shake but when she did not respond he turned to the others. "Something's wrong."

"She's just drained," Dustin said trying to reassure himself as well as

the others.

"No, no, no, she won't wake up. El!" Mike shook her again, pleading for her to wake. "El! El!"

---

Hopper and Joyce continued to follow the trail of blood left by the monster. It led them to a deserted road, with abandoned cars parked on the side. It was uncanny how exactly this world mirrored their own in geography and structure, as if they were seeing the future of their world, destroyed and left to rot.

"There's more blood," Hopper pointed out and they both held their flashlights high as they looked about themselves for the trail.

Joyce spotted another stain of blood and pointing down a road with eerie streetlights, she said, "This way."

Hopper followed her to a large building. The Upside Down version of the public library. The structure was overgrown with dead vines. Something felt off about this place and Hopper did not like it. Nevertheless, he gave Joyce a glance and they headed inside.

---

Mike lifted his ear from Eleven's chest and announced, "She's barely breathing."

"We gotta go," Lucas urged.

Before Mike could ask how a voice called out down the hall, "Leave her!"

The authority in that voice as it broke through the silence startled the boys and they jumped back as Brenner and several soldiers came around the corner. Brenner casually stepped over his agents without a downward glance and Mike, Lucas, and Dustin stood to face him.

"Step away from the child," Brenner commanded.

Mike stepped forward so that he stood between Brenner and Eleven's unconscious form. He yelled back, "No! You want her, you have to kill us first!"



"That's right!" Dustin hollered as he joined Mike.

Taking great care not to step on Eleven, Lucas flanked Mike's other side and bellowed passionately, "Eat shit!"

Soldiers appeared from behind the boys and they snatched the kids, pulling them up and away from Eleven. They screamed in protest.

"Oh, no! No, no!" Dustin yelled.

Mike tried to wriggle free. "No, no! Get off me!"

"You idiot!" Lucas hurled at his captor. "No!"

"Get off me!"

"Ow! Let go!"

Ignoring the irate boys, Brenner strode forward and knelt on the floor beside Eleven. He cradled her head between his hands and pulled her up so that she sat before him, though he had to support her limp body. He gave her a shake, "Eleven? Eleven, can you hear me?"

She finally opened her eyes and said weakly, "Papa?"

Brenner smiled, pleased. "Yes, yes, it's your Papa."

"Get off of me!" screamed Mike. Eleven turned to see her struggling friends.

"I'm here now," Brenner continued.

"Let her go!" Mike bellowed furiously. "Let her go, you bastard!"

Eleven whimpered and moaned as Brenner caressed the side of her head.

"Ssh, ssh, you're sick," he told her. "You're sick, but I'm going to make you better. I'm going to take you back home, where I can make you well again. Where we can make all of this better, so no one else gets hurt."

She looked into his eyes as she had done so many times before. Eyes

which she had always tried to please with displays of her power. Brenner peered back into her weak and tired face and saw disbelief.

"Bad. Bad," she said and she reached out to Mike. "Mike. Mike. Mike. Mike. Mike."

She attempted to push Brenner's hand away from her face, not wanting him to touch her. She wanted nothing to do with him and Brenner saw that he had lost her. Her loyalty, her trust, her desire to please him, for his affection; it was all gone. His face fell at the realization. Suddenly, electricity surged over their heads and everyone froze.

"Blood," Mike said.

"What?" Lucas asked looking at Mike.

"Blood," he repeated as his eyes roamed over the dead agents scattered across the hall, taking in the dark, red blood which had literally been squeezed from their skulls.

A loud thud sounded from the end of the hall and they all spun to stare at the concrete wall featuring the school's logo. As they watched the wall began to crumble outward. The guards nearest quickly backed away. The wall fell to pieces easily as a faceless monster forced his way through to their world. The boys stared in horror.

"Demogorgon," Dustin stated.

The creature burst free from the wall and towered before them. Then its face opened up, and a roar erupted from its rows of teeth. The guards holding the boys captive let them go and immediately went for their sidearms. Soon a firestorm of bullets sprayed out at the monster as Mike, Lucas and Dustin lurched forward to lift Eleven and carry her to safety.

With the others' help, Dustin cradled her and he ran down the hall away from the monster and the soldiers, Mike and Lucas shouting directions.

The monster screeched in anger at the gunshots as Brenner gazed at it in fascinated horror. With a terrible screech the Demogorgon leapt

forward onto Brenner in a violent attack.

---

Hopper searched along the dark aisles of the library following the bloody trail with his flashlight. It led all the way into a back room, which in their world would have been restricted to employees. Nearby Joyce searched along the vines and weblike substance that covered nearly every surface.

"Oh, my God," she whispered repulsed when she spotted a human skull.

Hopper too examined a mess of organic slime thinking it looked like mucus. His eyes widened in horror and disgust with the discovery of the remains of Barbara Holland. With a sickening feeling, he realized the girl's family could never be told what became of her.

The beam of Joyce's flashlight shone over the walls of the library revealing nothing but more vines. Suddenly, however, the beam crossed over the face of a young boy standing against the wall.

"Will!" she cried out. "Will!"

She ran forward to where her son stood and Hopper turned and quickly made his way over to Joyce. She arrived by her son's side but pulled up short as she took in the full sight of him. Will was not standing but rather suspended against the wall. His eyes remained shut despite his mother's cries and a large vine protruded from his gaping mouth.

"Will! Oh, my God! Will! Hopper!" Joyce called desperately to Hopper as he neared her. "Oh my God! You need to help get him out!"

Hopper took one look at Will and was revisited by the nightmare that was the memory of his daughter lying in a hospital bed with a ventilation tube shoved down her throat.

"Get him out!" Joyce panicked bringing Hopper sharply back to the present.

Will's head was just about level with Hopper's shoulder so that he had to reach up to pull the vine out. He used one hand to grab Will's chin

in order to keep from yanking his head forward and he wrapped his other hand around the vine and began to pull. It was a thick vine. As thick as Will's mouth was wide and it appeared to have grown all the way down either his airway or his esophagus, which one Hopper could not be sure. The vine was difficult to pull out and Hopper ended up grabbing it with his other hand as well, using his full strength to pull it out. The vine was clearly alive and resisting him. Finally, he pulled it free from Will and tossed it to the ground where it hissed and slithered forward like a snake.

"Oh, Jesus!" he yelled out in horror and he pulled up the automatic rifle and shot the damn thing until it stopped moving.

---

Lights flickered and gunshots rang out as the boys ran through the school halls with Eleven. They searched for a place to hide as the soldiers battled the monster, turning the school into a warzone.

Mike led the way shouting to the others, "Come on, come on!"

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!" Dustin muttered repeatedly as he shuffled quickly after Mike, weighed down with Eleven in his arms. He ran past a man shooting at the creature down an adjacent hall and they could hear other men shouting orders and some screaming in pain.

Mike burst through the door of the nearest classroom which turned out to be the science lab. Dustin struggled across the threshold with Eleven.

"Sorry," he told her. "Hold on, we're almost there. We're almost there."

Lucas came in last and shut the door behind him. At the back of the class Dustin hurried over to a set of lab tables where he attempted to lay Eleven. However, his trembling arms could not quite lift her high enough.

"Help, help," he grunted and Lucas ran forward to help lift her before Dustin's arms gave out. "Come on, get her on the table."

Eleven groaned weakly as they set her on the hard surface and Mike came to her side, taking her hand in his.

"Just hold on a little longer, okay? He's gone," he said comfortingly. "The bad man's gone. We'll be home soon, and my mom...she'll get you your own bed. You can eat as many *Eggos* as you want. And we can go to the Snow Ball."

Eleven stared up at Mike and pleaded, "Promise?"

"Promise," Mike answered squeezing her hand tightly in both of his. A deafening screech from the hall caused Mike, Lucas and Dustin to jump back, startled.

They listened in fearful anticipation as gunfire continued amid the roars of the Demogorgon. All of a sudden there was silence.

"I-i-is - is - is it dead?" stuttered Dustin hopefully.

The boys waited for something to happen, but with a loud bang the door flew off its hinges and skidded on the classroom floor the Demogorgon atop it on all fours.

"Go go go go!" Mike screamed.

"Get the wrist rocket! Get the wrist rocket now!" Dustin bellowed desperately.

The boys hollered at Lucas who sped to remove his backpack and pull out the only weapon they had at their disposal.

"Go go go go go!" urged Mike as the monster roared and stalked closer. "Go go go!"

"Take it out now!" Dustin screamed.

Lucas readied the wrist rocket as Dustin searched through the bag for the rocks they had gathered from the playground.

Mike shouted at him, "Get the rocks, get the rocks, get the rocks!"

"Getting the rocks!" he yelled back.

"Give me one!" Lucas pleaded.

Dustin thrust one into his hand and hollered. "Come on!"

"Go go go, kill it, kill it!" Mike screamed as Lucas drew the rock back in the sling.

"Fire! Fire!" Dustin wailed.

Lucas let the rock fly and his aim was true as it hit the creature precisely on its face where an eye would be. The problem was that the monster had no eyes and it merely roared its aggravation.

Nevertheless, Lucas implored the others, "Give me another one!"

"Kill it! Bastard!" Dustin bellowed.

"Kill it! Go go go go!" cried Mike.

"Kill it now! Get, get, get!" Dustin became incoherent as he snatched up another rock and shoved it into Lucas' hand when the next rock did no more damage than the first. "Come on, kill the bastard!"

"It's not working!" Lucas screamed desperately to the others as he loaded the sling, but their fear and helplessness only persisted and they pleaded with him.

"Hit him again!"

"Kill him!"

"Keep going! Come on!" Mike screamed in terror as the monster loomed closer than ever.

"Get, get, get! Come on, kill it!" Dustin gave Lucas yet another rock.

"Come on! Go go go!"

Lucas loaded the sling once again, he drew the bungee cord back as far as he could and aimed carefully at the center of the monster's face. This time it opened its face in another roar and Lucas waited until he could see every row of teeth before he let the cord go and

the stone flew out toward its target.

The Demogorgon was thrown back with such force that it flew across the class and hit the opposite wall with a rattling thud. Its arms were splayed out across the chalkboard and it roared in terrible pain. The boys leapt back in shock, panting and confused. All became clear however when Eleven stepped past them to confront the monster face to face. As she did Mike noticed how pale and gray she looked. Sweat covered her dark expression, and blood trailed from her ears and nose. He thought she looked like a walking corpse, and he realized she could not take much more. He ran forward.

"Eleven, stop!"

But without a backward glance she threw her arm out behind her and Mike felt his body fly through the air. He skidded across the floor and hit the cupboards at the back of the class with great force. He held his head and groaned in pain and shock. Dustin and Lucas gasped as they watched feeling powerless and terrified.

Lights flickered faster than ever as Eleven strode forward evenly while the monster screeched and struggled against the force holding it against the wall. Mike lifted his head and watched Eleven walk away from him and up to the monster until she was feet from it. Only then did she turn to peer back at the boys behind her. Her eyes roved over Lucas whose gaping mouth closed with a pained expression. Then, over Dustin who stared at her with a mixture of awe and sadness. Then her eyes rested on Mike whose arms were still raised in a defensive pose from when she had forced him back.

As he watched her his arms dropped in defeat, and from across the room he heard Eleven say, "Goodbye, Mike."

Tears fell fast and freely as Mike watched the girl, who had literally turned his life upside down, turn her back to him.

Eleven faced the monster who had killed so many in the short time it roamed free in their world. Freed by her.

"No more," she told it as she glared at the struggling monster. It roared in agony and fear.

She could feel it fighting her so she lifted her hand to help control the power. It screeched, whimpered and moaned at the force tearing it apart. Its agonized wails were earsplitting and Lucas, Dustin and Mike covered their ears from the pain of it. The Demogorgon reached out a clawed arm toward the child that faced it so fearlessly, struggling to reach her, to tear her apart and end the torture. But Eleven's anger and will was stronger than the monster and she screamed fiercely forcing every ounce of strength and power she had into tearing the creature into shreds. The creature withdrew its arm and could only let out a horrific roar as the energy Eleven created in its midst let off heat in the form of light. The light grew in the center of its chest burning the creature from the inside out.

Lucas and Dustin pressed their hands tighter over their ears trying to block out the deafening cries. Their eyes were squeezed shut from the sound. Mike crouched on the floor his knees drawn up to his chest and his hands crushing his ears not wanting to hear the terrible sound of Eleven's screams. His eyes were trained on her but, no longer able to watch her sacrifice, he squeezed his eyes closed, tears trailing down his face as he sobbed on the floor.

A numbness washed over Eleven, but she refused to release the creature from her power. Its body unraveled before her and even if she had wanted to she would not have been able to stop the flow of energy emanating from her. The Demogorgon was reduced to shatters of dead flakes that engulfed Eleven. With a surge of electricity the lights stopped flickering and all was silent.

Dustin, Lucas and Mike glanced up. They saw bits of flakes from the monster floating to the floor, an impression in the chalkboard from where Eleven had thrown the monster so forcefully, and nothing more. The monster was gone. And so was Eleven.

Mike climbed quickly to his feet and shoved past Lucas. "El? El? El!"

He searched behind overturned chairs and under desks desperately hoping she was hiding somewhere. His friends strode forward to help.

"Eleven!" called Lucas.



"Eleven!" Dustin hollered.

Mike grew panicked as he yelled out, "El! El, where are you? Eleven! El?"

He listened anxiously for an answer or a sign, more tears falling when no reply came.

---

Joyce yanked her helmet off and tossed it to the ground as Hopper gently laid Will on the ground.

"Oh, God," she groaned as she bent her ear to his mouth and listened as Hopper too yanked his helmet off and threw it aside.

"He's not breathing, he's not breathing," she cried. "He isn't-"

Hopper interrupted her pulling her back from Will. "Alright, Joyce, listen to me, listen to me, listen to me!"

She paused and listened desperately as he explained what to do.

"I need you to tilt his head back..."

"Okay!"

"...and lift his chin," he ordered as he placed both hands, one on top of the other, over the center of Will's chest.

"Okay."

Hopper began pushing hard on Will's chest, compressing his heart. He counted, "One, two, three, four. Now when I tell you, you're gonna pinch his nostrils, and breath into his mouth...twice."

"Okay," Joyce replied through her tears and panic.

"One second..." continued Hopper as he continued to perform compressions. "...then pause. Twenty-two, twenty-three. Then one second."

"Okay," cried Joyce.

"Twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty. Now go!"

Joyce immediately bent her head down to Will's and covered his mouth with hers as she pinched his nostrils shut. She blew air in then paused before giving him another breath. She lifted her head but Will continued to lie there not breathing.

"Oh come on, come on!" she cried desperately and Hopper went back to giving him compressions.

"Come on, come on kid!" yelled Hopper. "Come on kid!"

"Will! Will, listen to me! It's me, it's your mom and I love you so much. I love you so much! I love you more than anything in the world!" Joyce wailed pleading for him to hear. "Please, please..."

Hopper continued pounding away at his heart and all he could see was his daughter as the nurses and doctors worked on her while machines beeped away that her life was ending.

*"Blood pressure keeps dropping," the nurse said as the doctor compressed Sarah's chest. "Her pulse ox is falling."*

Joyce sobbed, "I love you so much. I love you more than anything in the world. Please, please come back to me! Just, please, please wake up!"

"Come on kid!" Hopper shouted.

"Please, please! Please, Will! Come on!"

*Hopper and his wife stood helplessly to the side as they watched their daughter fade away. The EKG monitoring their daughter's heart beeped and a flat continuous tone sounded from it with a straight line replacing the wavy, erratic lines that had been Sarah's heart activity.*

*"Flatlining," the nurse called out.*

*Hopper held his wife as she wept into his shoulder and he had never felt more powerless.*

"Come back to me, breathe!" yelled Joyce as Hopper pounded Will's chest with his fist. "I need you to wake up now! I need you to breathe! Please breathe! Please! Breathe!"

With a gasp Will jolted up and coughed struggling for air. Hopper and Joyce pulled him into a sitting position.

Wrapping her arms around him and rubbing his back Joyce encouraged him. "That's it! Oh my God! That's it, that's it! That's it baby, breathe! Breathe! Alright, come on! Come on!"

He continued coughing and Hopper edged past Joyce to pull out her breathing mask from her helmet.

"Breathe, breathe, come on, come on."

Hopper pulled the mask over Will's face and Joyce encouraged him to breathe normally. "Good, good, good, good. Just breathe, Will, breathe!"

As Will took deep breaths through the mask Joyce broke down sobbing, and Hopper panted as he looked around the terrible place feeling deep relief and raw emotion.

---

The parking lot outside of Hawkins Middle School swarmed with police officers, firefighters, and paramedics as a Volkswagen drove into the midst of the scene. Tarps covered bodies laid out on the ground and a police car drove past a school bus, its lights flashing in the windows. The Volkswagen screeched to a stop and Karen and Ted hopped out of the car. Karen searched through the sea of first responders as she scanned for her son.

"Michael?" she called out. She began rushing through the scene calling for her child. "Michael! Michael?"

Sitting on the edge of the floorboards in the back of an ambulance she spotted Mike wrapped in a blanket and flanked by two medics.

"Michael! Oh my God! Oh my God!" she cried as she ran to him. She snatched him up and embraced him tightly, kissing his forehead. "You're okay. You're okay."

She held him close as he cried and trembled in her arms.

---

*Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.*

It was that sound which Will heard first, so different than the noises he had become accustomed to during his time in the Upside Down.

He was lying on something soft and he could feel something in his nose. His eyes opened. Everything was bright and blurry and it took some time for his eyes to adjust to the light. When his vision focused he found himself looking up at two wide-eyed worried faces. Two very familiar faces.

"Hey," said Joyce as she ruffled his hair gently. "Hi, sweetheart."

"Hey," whispered Jonathan.

Will stared up at them for a moment, then the corners of his mouth lifted into a small smile at the sight of them and he said weakly, "Where...where am I?"

Joyce sighed in relief as she glanced at Jonathan who smiled and said, "You're home. You're home now. You're safe."

"Jonathan!" Will said excitedly as his mind began to catch up with his senses.

Jonathan smiled as tears dripped onto Will's hospital covers. Hearing his little brother's excitement over seeing him was more than he could ever ask for.

"Yeah, it's me buddy," he nodded and sighed in relief. "We missed you. We really missed you."

Will looked down at his hand which Jonathan was holding in both of his own. He noticed Jonathan's left hand was wrapped in a bandage.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"What this? It's just a cut. It's nothing," Jonathan's grin grew wider and he chuckled as he said, "You're worried about my hand."

Jonathan and Joyce chuckled at the incredible miracle of having Will here worrying about a cut on a hand. Will looked up at his mother not quite getting the joke but she merely peered lovingly down at him, stroking his hair.

"Oh, hey, uh," Jonathan reached down and pulled up a box filled to the brim with several items. "We, uh...We brought you some stuff...so you don't get bored in here."

He quickly rifled through the box and pulled out a cassette tape and held it up for Will to see. "So, uh, I made you a new mixtape."

Will took it as Jonathan continued, "There's some stuff on there I think you really might like."

Will smiled at Jonathan then looked up into his mother's eyes. He had not quite made up his mind if he was dreaming or not but he decided if this was only a dream he was in no hurry to wake up.

In the hospital waiting room a group of people waited silently to hear of news on Will. Hopper chewed on his fingernail as he ignored Ted's snores from beside him. On Ted's other side Steve stared at nothing in particular as he thought about the night's events. Across from them Karen sat anxiously as she struggled to understand what had happened despite her limited knowledge. Nancy could only think about Barb and wishing she could have done something, anything, differently. Beside her Dustin leaned on Lucas as he drooled in his sleep and Lucas' head leaned back against the wall's window behind him. Both snored quietly from their exhausting week. Beside Lucas was Mike, unable to sleep or think about anything but Eleven and her sacrifice.

Suddenly, the door to the waiting room opened and Mike looked up to see Jonathan leaning in.

"Yeah," Jonathan whispered with a nod to Mike.

Mike jumped up from his seat and prodded his friends awake. "Guys. Guys, he's up! Will's up! Guys, Will's up! Guys, come on!"

He ran for the door as Lucas and Dustin woke. Lucas pushed Dustin

off him and made an annoyed gesture at him as the latter wiped the drool from his face. Then they too followed Mike out into the hall at a run.

Will and his mother were laughing about something when the door to his room opened and Mike, Lucas, and Dustin came flooding in. Will's face lit up at the sight of them.

"Byers!" Mike shouted excitedly and he dashed to his side and laid his head on Will's chest as he hugged him, Lucas right beside him also leaned down to hug him.

"Be careful, be careful with him," Joyce warned them.

"Move!" Dustin yanked Lucas and Mike off of Will and then leaned down to hug him himself.

"Guys, guys. Go easy on him," chuckled Jonathan.

Will however grinned brightly at the sight of his friends and he returned Dustin's hug, patting him on the back.

"You won't believe what happened when you were gone, man," Lucas told him ecstatically.

"It was mental," piped Dustin.

"You had a funeral," said Lucas.

"Jennifer Hayes was crying," Dustin chimed in quickly.

"And Troy peed himself," Lucas informed.

"What!" Will gasped at this piece of information.

"In front of the whole school!" Dustin clarified.

"Yes!" confirmed Lucas.

Will began to laugh but it quickly turned into a coughing fit and the boys watched anxiously as they waited for it to stop, their smiles slipping.

"You okay?" asked Mike when Will's coughs subsided.

Will nodded then looking up at Mike he admitted, "It got me. The Demogorgon."

"We know. It's okay. It's dead," said Mike and Will nodded as he thought about the monster, but he looked up as Mike said, "We made a new friend. She stopped it. She saved us. But she's gone now."

Mike's face fell and looking at his three friends Will knew they had experienced something life-changing, just as he had.

"Her name's Eleven," Dustin told him.

"Like the number?" Will asked.

"Well, we call her El for short," Lucas pointed out.

"She's basically a wizard," Dustin went on.

Lucas whispered, "She has superpowers."

"More like a Yoda," pitched Mike unable to help himself.

"She flipped a van with her mind," Dustin said excitedly as Will gasped in awe. "And these agents..."

Mike and Lucas began to speak over Dustin as the boys began to recount their week with Eleven.

"...were trying to shoot us..."

"Yeah, it flipped over us..."

"Then, she squeezed the brains out..."

"And blood was pouring out of their faces..."

"It was pouring out of their eyes."

"Agents just started grabbing us..."

"...shot out of the wall..."

Nancy and Jonathan watched the boys with grins on their faces, loving the innocence with how they viewed the horrors of that night. But Nancy's smile was short-lived as her thoughts turned to Barb once again. She could not listen any longer and she left the boys to their happy reunion. Jonathan turned and watched as she retreated wishing he could do or say something to comfort her, but deciding that what she needed was to be alone he turned back to watch the boys.

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Stepping out into the ER bay Hopper lit a cigarette and began walking through the chilly night air toward his truck. All he wanted to do was go home, eat a sandwich, get drunk and go to sleep. Suddenly, he heard the sound of a car pulling up directly behind him and he turned to see an unmarked black car parked in the ambulance bay. An agent in a black suit stepped out from the passenger side and gave him a cold, stern look before turning and opening the cab door to the back seat of the car. Hopper turned and looked toward his truck in deep frustration before taking another swig from his cigarette. Then, he tossed it to the ground and climbed into the back of the car. The agent shut him in and climbed back into the passenger seat. They drove off into the night.



## 10. Epilogue - One Month Later

### Epilogue - One Month Later

Christmas wreaths hung in every window of the Wheeler house as snow drifted weightless to the ground. In the basement sat four boys around a table intent on the outcome of a *Dungeons and Dragons* campaign in full swing.

"Something is coming. Something angry," said Mike glancing seriously between his three friends. "Hungry for your blood. It is coming."

Dustin and Lucas waited anxiously.

"What is it?" asked Will eagerly.

"It's the thessalhydra, I'm telling you," Dustin predicted knowingly.

Lucas made an annoyed gesture. "It's not the thessalhydra."

"I'm telling you, it's the thessalhydra," persisted Dustin.

Mike slammed the game piece he had been hiding from the others on the table and proclaimed, "The thessalhydra!"

"Damn it!" groaned Dustin as Lucas threw up his arms in defeat.

"It roars in anger!" Mike narrated then he turned to Will. "Will, your action!"

Will petitioned Dustin and Lucas. "What should I do? I-"

"Fireball him," ordered Lucas as if it were the obvious solution.

Will glanced at Dustin who brought his hand to his chin in thought. Then, with a smirk he advised Will, "Fireball the son of a bitch."

The four boys grinned appreciatively and Will reached for the dice. Shaking them quickly in his hand he sent them flying over the table.

"Fourteen!" the boys exclaimed excitedly.

"Direct hit!" Mike announced. "Will the Wise's fireball hits the thessalhydra! It makes a painful..." (he screeched like a dying animal), "and then..." (he dropped to his knees), "it crumbles to the ground."

He reached out to Will who waited in great anticipation as he continued, "It's clawed hand reaches for you one last time and, and, and, and..."

Mike threw the rest of himself to the floor, feigning death and as one Dustin, Lucas, and Will leapt to their feet in celebration.

"Yeah!" they exclaimed.

Will wrapped his arms around Lucas in a triumphant hug and he joined Lucas and Dustin in a victory dance around the table as Mike climbed back into his chair.

Mike finished the conclusion. "Lucas, cuts off its seven heads, and Dustin places them into his bag of holding," (Dustin solemnly held up his backpack) "You carry the heads out of the dungeons, victorious," (Lucas gritted his teeth and gave a victorious grunt) "and you present them to King Tristan. He thanks you for your bravery and service."

"Whoa. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," Dustin held his hand up looking confused as he sat back at the table. "That's not it, is it?"

"No, there's a medal ceremony-" Mike added thinking he wanted more pomp.

"Oh, a medal ceremony," repeated Dustin sarcastically. "What are you talking about?"

"And-" Mike wracked his brains for something more glamorous.

"The campaign was way too short," Lucas pointed out.

"Yeah!" agreed Will.

"It was ten hours!" griped Mike.

"But it doesn't make any sense!" Dustin snapped.

"It makes sense!"

"Uh, no, what about the lost knight?"

"And the proud princess?" questioned Lucas.

"And those weird flowers in the cave?" Will reminded him.

"I don't know, it's-" Mike began defensively. However, he and the others looked up as the basement door opened and someone came down the steps from the first floor.

"Oh geez, what's that smell?" Jonathan asked as he made a face. "Have you guys been playing games all day, or just farting?"

The boys giggled amused and with a wide smile Lucas said, "Oh, that's just Dustin. He farted."

Dustin's smile slipped off his face and Lucas began to imitate fart noises as he sang, "Dustin farted. Dustin farted. Dustin farted. Dustin farted!"

"Okay. Very mature, Lucas," Dustin said as he sang, and when he continued he whined, "Oh, shut up!"

"Will," Jonathan beckoned his brother who looked up. "Come on."

Will got to his feet and gathered his things then waved to the others. "Bye guys."

"Bye, Will," said Dustin and Lucas.

"See you, Will," waved Mike.

Lucas raised his arm as Will passed him and they high-fived. Then, Dustin came over and punched Lucas playfully on the shoulder. Lucas stood from his seat and hit him back, so Dustin retaliated.

"Stop," Dustin told him.

"No you stop," retorted Lucas.

"No you stop."

Soon their playful fight turned into a wrestling match in which Lucas had Dustin in a headlock. Dustin struggled and groaned as he attempted to free himself. Lucas let out a high-pitched squeal as Dustin twisted his other arm.

"Yeah, scream!" he mocked Lucas. "You're like a little girl!"

Unnoticed by the two warring friends, Mike had turned away from their fight to peer sadly at the small fort in the back of the basement. Mike had not touched it in a month and preferred to keep it up. It was comforting somehow as if its resident was merely away on a trip and would be back. Mike's eyes lowered to the floor as the now familiar hollow feeling replaced his earlier jubilation. There had been no sign or contact from Eleven. She was gone. And it was times like these, when he laughed and played with his friends and found himself spending hours without thinking of her, that he missed her most.

Upstairs Jonathan and Will exited the basement.

"So, you have fun?" Jonathan asked.

"Yeah," said a smiling Will.

"Hey, boys," said Karen, who had looked up from the Christmas cake she was decorating as they passed.

"Hi," Will greeted cheerfully.

"Hey, Mrs. Wheeler," said Jonathan respectfully.

Karen smiled warmly at the pair. "Hey, wish your mom a Merry Christmas for me, okay?"

"Yeah," assured Will.

"Yeah, thank you. Uh, Merry Christmas," Jonathan added.

"Merry Christmas."

The boys continued on their way to the front door and Jonathan continued his inquiry about Will's day. "So, uh, you win?"

"Yeah," Will affirmed proudly.

"Awesome."

"Hey, Jonathan, wait up."

Jonathan glanced up to see Nancy darting quickly down the stairs with a wrapped Christmas gift in her hands. She walked straight to him and presented the gift to him.

"Uh..." Jonathan took the gift awkwardly

"Merry Christmas," she told him.

"Thanks, um. I - I didn't get you anything," he admitted with an apologetic smile. "I - I feel bad."

"No! No, it's uh, it's not really a present," She smiled up at him as she tried to explain. "It's um...Well, you'll see."

Then, she leaned forward and, standing on tiptoe, she kissed his cheek. He stared down at her surprised and she gazed down at her feet, blushing. Yet, when she peered back up at him he smiled kindly and said, "Merry Christmas."

Jonathan turned away and asked his brother, "You ready?"

"Yeah."

"Let's go."

Outside of the Wheeler's house Jonathan and Will climbed into his car. He rubbed his hands together for warmth then glanced at Will who had not put his seatbelt on.

"All right. Buckle up," he ordered.

Will buckled his seat belt over himself as Jonathan started the engine. He looked down at the gift Nancy had given Jonathan and

felt a wave of curiosity.

"Can I open it?"

Jonathan looked from the gift to his kid brother and smiled. Fast as Will was growing he still hadn't lost that childlike excitement over opening presents. "Yeah, sure."

He watched just as curiously as Will tore off the wrapping paper.

"Whoa," mumbled Will impressed. He held up the box for Jonathan to see, revealing a brand new camera. One of the best. "Pretty cool."

Jonathan chuckled softly to himself. "Yeah. Yeah, pretty cool."

He threw the car into drive and they headed home through the snowy night.

In the Wheeler's living room Ted snored loudly in his recliner, a bowl of popcorn sitting in his lap, as Nancy stepped over his feet and around the coffee table where she joined Steve on the sofa.

He smiled contentedly as she curled up beside him and he wrapped his arm around her.

Stroking her side he asked, "Did you give it to him?"

She peered up into his face and nodded. "Yeah."

He grinned, satisfied, and held her hand in his as she nestled her head tiredly on his shoulder.

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Christmas music played quietly among the buzz of chatter in the small Hawkins police station. On the bulletin board hung several holiday greeting cards among a few newspaper clippings including one featuring a photo of Will Byers and the title, "The Boy Who Came Back to Life". Throughout the station lights and decorations were strung up on walls and near the entrance Flo spoke animatedly to one of the police officers and his wife.

Another officer entered the Christmas party, escorting his wife. He

nodded in greeting to one of his colleagues and they made their way over passing Hopper as they did so. Hopper was busy zipping up his fur-lined coat, an unlit cigarette dangling from his lips. He turned and grabbed a tupperware dish from a side table and headed over to the refreshments where he began to fill the dish with food.

"You leaving already, Chief?" asked Powell.

"Oh, come on, you think I actually wanted to come to this thing?" Hopper commented. "I was just hungry."

"Oh, yeah, that's the spirit," piped Callahan wearing a festive elf's hat.

"Well , your wife doesn't have time to cook for me, you know what I'm saying?" quipped Hopper with a sly grin.

Powell and the other officers laughed at Callahan's expense as Hopper made his way toward the exit. He was ambushed by Flo who reached up and snatched the cigarette from his mouth. He waited for her to say something biting.

"Merry christmas, Hop," she patted his chest.

"Mmm," Hopper smirked.

Flo chuckled as she walked off and Hopper left the party behind him.

A few miles away Hopper drove his truck down a snowy road before pulling off to the side. He turned his truck off and pulled out his flashlight, which he switched on, and the tupperware dish he had filled with food from the party. He passed the front of his truck and walked into the dark woods, using his flashlight to guide him over the cold ground.

Snow crunched underfoot as he walked between trees and stepped over a large log. Finally, he crouched before a wooden box which was nailed to the ground. Its lid, which was slanted was covered with snow. Nevertheless, he lifted the lid and set the food dish inside. Then, reaching into his coat pocket, he pulled out a pack of *Eggos*, which he had seram-wrapped earlier that night and carefully set it on top of the dish. He closed the lid. Looking out past the trees into the night all he could think about was how cold it was out there. With a

sad smile he retrieved his flashlight and trekked back to his truck leaving the food in the snow-capped box.

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The Byers' humble home glowed with warm lights and Christmas music played softly as the family dog barked. But, when he was ignored, he quickly placed his front paws up on the kitchen counter and snagged a large chunk of ham from the cutting board.

In the living room Jonathan asked Will, "What you got there? That one of yours?"

"Yeah," Will replied, holding a large wrapped gift in his hands as he squatted by the Christmas tree.

"Looks pretty big," Jonathan mumbled as he focused in on his brother trying to guess what was inside the gift through the lens of his new camera. The light flashed as he snapped the photo and then he turned to see if his mother needed help in the kitchen. Will dropped the gift he was holding and Jonathan told him, "Be careful. You'll break it."

Joyce was setting dishes of food onto the dining room table when Jonathan came in and snapped a photo of her. The bright flash surprised her and she glanced up wide-eyed with an embarrassed smile. She placed her hands up in defense.

"What are you...what are you doing?"

Jonathan chuckled. "Documenting."

"Oh, why..." she complained.

"Because..." he snapped another photo as she laughed. "It looks great."

"Oh, this is just so overcooked," she fretted, gesturing at the meat. Then, she picked up the spoon in the mashed potatoes and scooped some up before letting it drip back into the bowl. "And look the potatoes are runny."

"Mom."



"They're so runny."

Jonathan edged around the table and patted his mother's back.  
"Mom, it's gonna be great."

"It's definitely an Atari," announced Will as he took his seat beside his mother at the dining table.

"An a-what-i?" she asked.

"The green present. It's an Atari," he repeated. "I felt Dustin's today, it's the same exact weight."

Joyce peeked at Jonathan who looked down at his plate.

"Really? Well..." she muttered.

"Yeah," confirmed Will unaware of Jonathan failing to smother his grin from across the table.

"We'll have to see won't we?" Joyce said simply.

Will glanced momentarily at his plate, then he stood from the table and began to walk away. Joyce reached out to him as if to pull him back.

"Hey, no more snooping," she told him.

"No, I forgot to wash my hands," he replied. "I'll be right back."

"Okay," she turned to Jonathan as Will strode away and whispered, "He's washing his hands?"

Jonathan laughed merrily and laid his dinner cloth over his lap feeling this was going to be the best Christmas ever.

Will stood over the bathroom sink, breathing heavily as he stared at his reflection in the mirror. He felt nauseous and woozy. Suddenly, his body heaved and he began to cough and gag. Leaning his head close to the sink, he retched out a fairly large amount of matter into the sink. Whatever it was wriggled and slid down the drain, leaving a slimy trail. He spit into the sink and glanced back up at his pale

reflection. Then, he turned the faucet on, the water washing away the evidence. A small moan escaped him after the havoc of vomiting.

Suddenly, the world flashed before his eyes and he was standing in a dead version of his family's bathroom. Water ran from the cracked faucet, horrible vines covered every surface, and dead flakes floated through the air. It was cold and dark, and what light there was flickered. And just as suddenly, he was back home. No vines, no flickering light, the water running from an undamaged faucet.

Will caught sight of his shocked expression, unsure of what had just happened. He turned the faucet off and looked anxiously around the bathroom as if expecting it to change again.

"Thanks," Jonathan said to his mother and they shared a laugh as Will joined them at the table.

Joyce's smile slipped as she saw the pallor of Will's face.

"Are you okay?" she asked him.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Will smiled with a shrug.

"Mmm. Very good, Mom," Jonathan said appreciatively as he ate having noticed nothing. "Mmm. Hey, Mom. Did Will tell you about, uh, the game?"

"Oh, yeah," piped Will eagerly.

"What game?" she asked curiously.

"I threw a fireball at him and..." Will imitated an explosion. "Dead."

Joyce frowned. "Wait, what is...you mean, this is..."

"No, it's just *Dungeons and Dragons*."

"*Dungeons and Dragons*. Right," she repeated.

"It's fun," Will told her.

The family chatted happily over their Christmas dinner and Will

Byers said nothing of what had happened.